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THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

# ARGOSY

JULY, 1956

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## MARGERY ALLINGHAM

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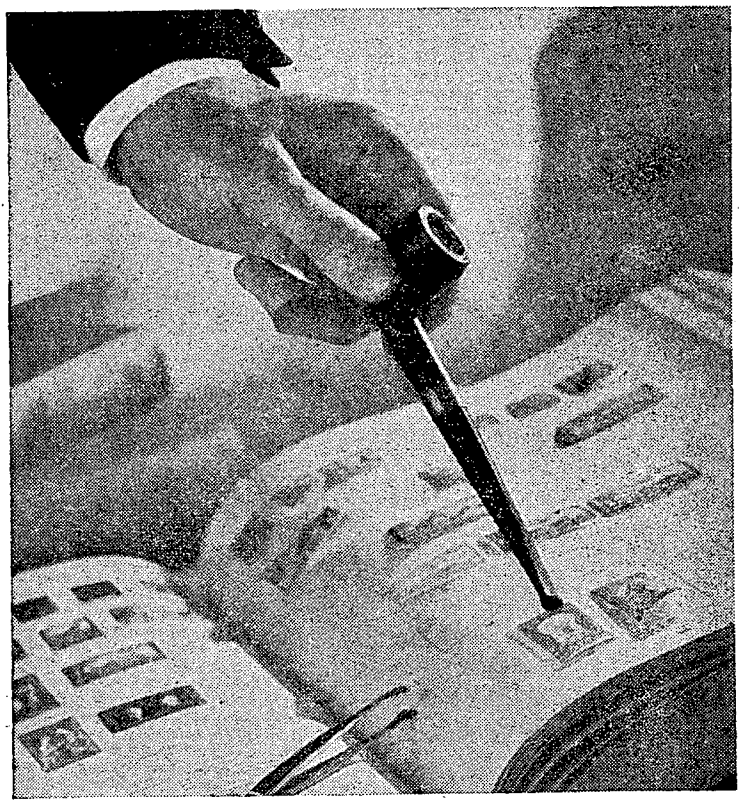

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# ARGOSY

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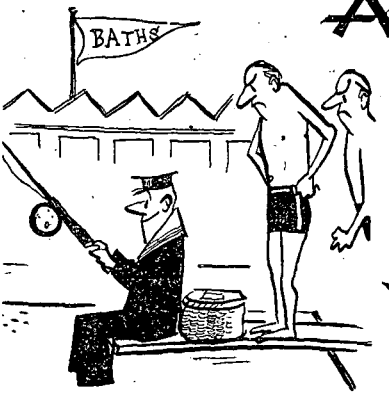


# ARGOSY Log Book

NOW'S the time for bent pins, jam jars full of tiddlers, or the more advanced forms of fishing-tackle; and what better equipment than a copy of Argosy for those long, peaceful hours by the river's brim when nothing's biting? Since it's not much bigger than a ham sandwich, though lasting a great deal longer, it should pack handily into those mysterious little satchels that fishermen carry about with them. We like to think of the angler, complete with Argosy, being slowly pulled into the water by a giant dace because he's too absorbed in Michael Gilbert to notice what's happening.

Fishermen—excepting the bent-pin brigade—can't, of course, just drop their lines and curl up with a copy of Argosy wherever they fancy; it's a question of getting a fishing-permit. We always wondered what happened to that Thomas Tittlemouse who lived in a little house:

*He caught fishes*
*In other men's ditches*

The chances are that he also caught a packet from irate ditch-owners. It would have been better for him if he'd caught something else, such as curlews in other men's purlieus, and we offer a guinea prize for the best couplet giving another suggestion as to what T. Tittlemouse caught. Couplets need not be probable but they must be printable. Send them, by July 10, to The Editor, Argosy, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.

**Margery Allingham** has been writing ever since she was seven, when her father equipped her with a study and the plot

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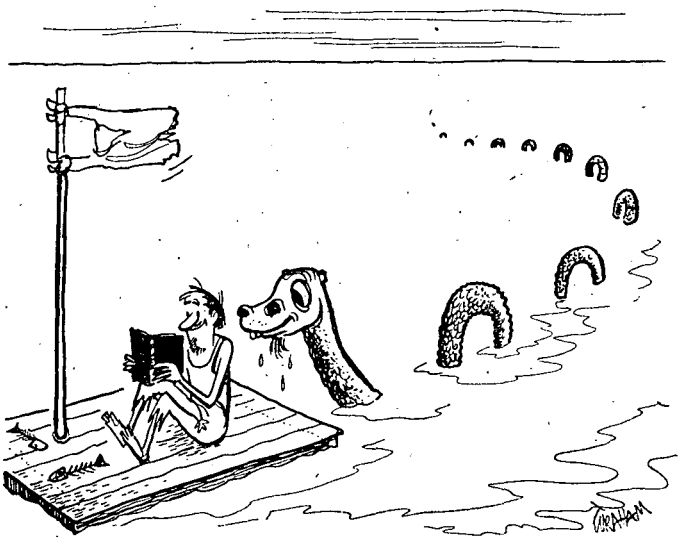
for a fairy-story. She had to write and rewrite this for nearly a year before he was satisfied, but after that she never looked back; her first published novel was written when she was sixteen. When she was twenty-four she wrote *The Crime at Black Dudley*, first of her "Albert Campion" novels, and since then her detective-hero has grown up with her, and has searched for clues through a whole series of gorgeously strange settings, in *Black Plumes*, for instance, and *Traitor's Purse*. Her story, on page 7, exemplifies the maxim that she who baths last baths longest.

**Erskine Caldwell**'s father was a mobile Presbyterian minister in the American Deep South, and until Caldwell was twenty-one he rarely lived more than six months in the same place; consequently he had little schooling except what his mother taught him. He went to sea for a bit, then went, on a scholarship, to the University of Virginia, where he financed himself by playing professional football, acting as bodyguard for a Chinaman, selling building lots under three feet of water. After working as a reporter for a while he retired to the country to write, and in five years produced *Tobacco Road*, *God's Little Acre* and a story called *Country Full of Swedes* which won the thousand-dollar Yale Review 1933 award. Caldwell writes of the American countryside as if he knew it as well as his own backyard; his new story on page 69 is a crusty bit of Southern-style humour.



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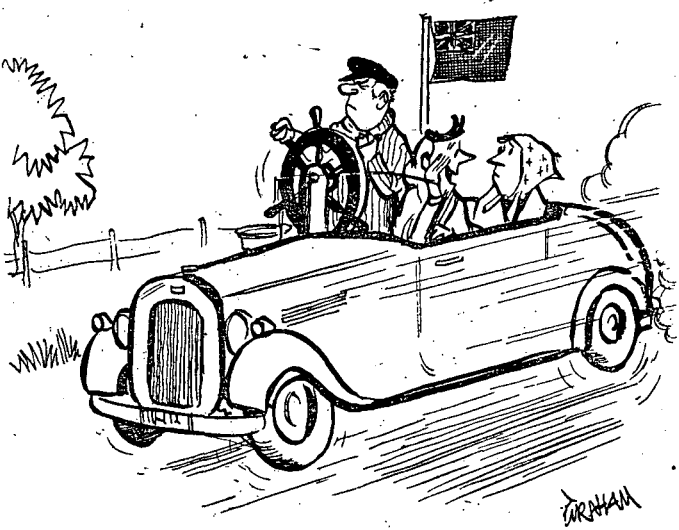
**Robert Sheckley** is twenty-eight, born in New York. He read science fiction with passion while at school and when he came home from the Korean war he enrolled in New York University and started right in writing short stories. Since then he has become a science-fiction king and has had stories in Collier's, Esquire, and many in Argosy. His latest, *M Molecule*, is one of those stunningly simple ideas that it takes a really brilliant writer to think up.

**Doris Lessing** came to England in 1949 at the age of thirty with very little money, a small son, and the manuscript of her first novel, *The Grass is Singing*, which was accepted at once and went into six reprints. Since then she has written three more novels —*Retreat to Innocence* has just come out—and a collection of stories about South Africa, *This was the Old Chief's Country*. She has a wonderful gift for capturing the feel and smell of the South Africa she knows so well.

We have been greatly encouraged by the very friendly responses to our request for candid criticism. They ranged from " Get rid of those awful modern poems," to " Leave the ruddy book as it is." We hope readers will continue to write in—the prizewinner of our first competition will be announced in next month's Argosy, on sale July 10.

JOHN SILVER



*" He adapted it himself "*

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# THREE IS A LUCKY NUMBER

*Success was liable to go to a man's head*

## BY MARGERY ALLINGHAM

AT five o'clock on a September afternoon Ronald Frederick Torbay was making preparations for his third murder. He was being very wary, forcing himself to go slowly because he was perfectly sane and was well aware of the dangers of carelessness.

A career of homicide got more chancy as one went on. That piece of information had impressed him as being true as soon as he had read it in a magazine article way back before his first marriage. Also, he realized, success was liable to go to a man's head, so he kept a tight hold on himself. He was certain he was infinitely more clever than most human beings but he did not dwell on the fact, and as soon as he felt the old thrill at the sense of his power welling up inside him, he quelled it firmly.

For an instant he paused, leaning on the rim of the wash-basin, and regarded himself thoughtfully in the shaving-mirror of the bathroom in the new villa he had hired so recently.

The face that looked back at him was thin, middle-aged, and pallid. Sparse dark hair receded from its high narrow forehead, and the well-shaped eyes were blue and prominent. Only the mouth was really unusual. That narrow slit, quite straight, was almost lipless and, unconsciously, he persuaded it to relax into a half smile. Even Ronald Torbay did not like his own mouth.

A sound in the kitchen below disturbed him and he straightened his back hastily. If Edyth had finished her ironing she would be coming up to take her long-discussed bubble-bath before he had prepared it for her, and that would never do. He waited, holding his breath, but it was all right; she was going out of the back door.

He reached the window just in time to see her disappearing round the side of the house into the small square yard which was so exactly like all the other square yards in the long suburban street. He knew that she was going to hang the newly pressed

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linen on the line to air, and although the manœuvre gave him the time he needed, it still irritated him.

Of the three homely, middle-aged women whom so far he had persuaded first to marry him and then to will him their modest possessions, Edyth was proving easily the most annoying. If he had told her once not to spend so much time in the yard he had done it a dozen times in their six weeks of marriage. He hated her being out of doors alone. She was shy and reserved, but now that new people had moved in next door there was always the danger of some over-friendly woman starting up an acquaintance with her, and that was the last thing to be tolerated at this juncture.

Each of his former wives had been shy. He had been very careful to choose the right type and felt he owed much of his success to it.

Mary, the first of them, had met her fatal "accident" almost unnoticed in the bungalow on a housing estate very like the present one he had chosen but in the north instead of the south of England. At the time it had been a growing place, the Coroner had been hurried, the police sympathetic but busy, and the neighbours scarcely curious except that one of them, a junior reporter on a local paper, had written a flowery paragraph about the nearness of tragedy in the midst of joy, published a wedding-day snapshot, and had entitled the article, with typical northern understatement, *Honeymoon Mishap*.

Dorothy's brief excursion into his life and abrupt exit from it and her own had given him a little more bother but not much. She had deceived him when she had told him she was quite alone in the world, and the interfering brother who had turned up after the funeral to ask awkward questions about her small fortune might have been a nuisance if Ronald had not been very firm with him. There had been a brief court case which Ronald had won and the insurance had paid up without a murmur.

All that was four years ago. Now, with a new name, a newly invented background, and a fresh area in which to operate, he felt remarkably safe.

From the moment he had first seen Edyth, sitting alone at a little table under the window in a seaside-hotel dining-room, he had known that she was to be his next subject. He always thought of his wives as "subjects." It lent his designs upon them a certain pseudo-scientific quality which he found satisfying.

Edyth had sat there looking stiff and neat and a trifle severe, but there had been a secret timidity in her face, an unsatisfied, half-frightened expression in her near-sighted eyes and once, when the waiter said something pleasant to her, she had flushed

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nervously and had then been embarrassed by it. Also, she was wearing a genuine diamond brooch. Ronald had observed that from right across the room. He had an eye for stones.

That evening in the lounge he had spoken to her, had weathered the initial snub, tried again, and finally had got her to talk. After that the acquaintance had progressed just as he had expected. His methods were old-fashioned and heavily romantic, and within a week she was hopelessly infatuated.

From Ronald's point of view her history was even better than he could have hoped. After teaching in a girls' boarding-school for the whole of her twenties, she had been summoned home to look after her recluse of a father whose long illness had monopolized her life; now, at forty-three, she was alone, comparatively well off, and as much at sea as a ship without a rudder.

Ronald was careful not to let her toes touch the ground. He devoted his entire attention to her, and exactly five weeks from the day on which they had first met, he married her at the registry office of the town, where they were both strangers. The same afternoon they each made wills in the other's favour and moved into the villa which he had been able to hire cheaply because the holiday season was at an end.

It had been the pleasantest conquest he had ever made. Mary had been moody and hysterical, Dorothy grudging and suspicious, but Edyth had revealed an unexpected streak of gaiety and, but for her stupidity in not realizing that a man would hardly fall romantically in love with her at first sight, was a sensible person. Any other man, Ronald reflected smugly, might have made the fatal mistake of feeling sorry for her, but he was above all that, he told himself, and he began to make plans for what he described in his own mind rather grimly as " her future."

Two things signed her death-warrant earlier than had been his original intention. One was her obstinate reticence over her monetary affairs and the other was her embarrassing interest in his job.

On the marriage certificate Ronald had described himself as a salesman, and the story he was telling was that he was a junior partner in a firm of cosmetic manufacturers who were giving him a very generous leave of absence. Edyth accepted the statement without question but almost at once she had begun to plan a visit to the office and the factory, and was always talking about the new clothes she must buy so as not to disgrace him.

At the same time she kept all her business papers locked in an old writing-case and steadfastly refused to discuss them, however cautiously he raised the subject. Ronald had given up feeling angry with her and had decided to act.

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He turned from the window, carefully removed his jacket, and began to run the bath. His heart was pounding, he noticed, frowning. He wished it would not. He needed to keep very calm.

The bathroom was the one room they had had repainted. Ronald had done it himself soon after they had arrived and had put up the little shelf over the bath to hold a jar of bath salts he had bought and a small electric heater of the old-fashioned, two-element type which was cheap but white like the walls and not too noticeable.

He leaned forward now and switched it on and stood looking at it until the two bars of glowing warmth appeared. Then he turned away and went out onto the landing, leaving it alight.

The fuse-box that controlled all the electricity in the house was concealed in the bottom of the linen cupboard at the head of the stairs. Ronald opened the door carefully and, using his handkerchief so that his fingerprints should leave no trace, pulled up the main switch.

Back in the bathroom the heater's glow died away; the bars were almost black again by the time he returned. He eyed the slender heater approvingly and then, still using the handkerchief, he lifted it bodily from the shelf and lowered it carefully into the water, arranging it so that it lay at an angle over the waste plug, close to the foot where it took up practically no room at all. The white flex ran up over the porcelain side of the bath, along the skirting board, under the door, and into a wall-socket just outside on the landing.

When he had first installed the heater, Edyth had demurred at this somewhat slipshod arrangement but when he had explained that the local Council was stupid and fussy about fitting wall-sockets in the bathrooms since water was said to be a conductor, she had compromised by letting him run the flex under the lino where it was not so noticeable.

At the moment the heater was perfectly visible in the bath. It certainly looked as if it had fallen into its odd position accidentally, but no one in his senses could have stepped into the water without seeing it. Ronald paused, his eyes dark, his ugly mouth narrower than ever. The beautiful simplicity of the main plan, so certain, so swiftly fatal, and above all, so safe as far as he himself was concerned, gave him a thrill of pleasure as it always did.

He turned off the bath and waited, listening. Edyth was coming back. He could hear her moving something on the concrete way outside the back door and he leaned over to where his jacket hung and took a paper sachet from its inside breast pocket. He was rereading the directions on the back of it when

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a slight sound made him turn his head and he saw, to his horror, the woman herself not five feet away. Her neat head had appeared suddenly just above the flat roof of the scullery, outside the bathroom window. She was clearing the dead leaves from the guttering and must, he guessed, be standing on the tall pair of steps which were kept just inside the back door.

It was typical of the man that he did not panic. Still holding the sachet lightly, he stepped between her and the bath and spoke mildly. "What on earth are you doing there, darling?"

Edyth started so violently at the sound of his voice that she almost fell off the steps and a flush of apprehension appeared on her thin cheeks. "Oh, how you startled me! I thought I'd just do this little job before I came up to change. If it rains, the gutter floods all over the back step."

"Very thoughtful of you, my dear." He spoke with that slightly acid amusement with which he had found he could best destroy her slender vein of self-assurance. "But not terribly clever when you knew I'd come up to prepare your beauty bath for you. Or was it?"

The slight intonation on the word "beauty" was not lost on her. He saw her swallow. "Perhaps it wasn't," she said without looking at him. "It's very good of you to take all this trouble, Ronald."

"Not at all," he said with just the right amount of masculine, off-hand insensitivity. "I'm taking you out tonight and I want you to look as nice as . . . er . . . possible. Hurry up, there's a good girl. The foam doesn't last indefinitely and like all these very high-class beauty treatments the ingredients are expensive. Undress in the bedroom, put on your gown, and come straight along."

"Very well, dear." She began to descend at once while he turned to the bath and shook the contents of the sachet into the water. The crystals, which were peach-coloured and smelt strongly of roses, floated on the tide and then, as he suddenly turned the pressure of water full on, began to dissolve into thousands of iridescent bubbles.

A momentary fear that their camouflage would not prove to be sufficient assailed him and he stooped to beat the water with his hand but he need not have worried. The cloud grew and grew into a fragrant feathery mass which not only obscured the bottom of the bath and all it contained but mounted the porcelain sides, smothering the white flex and overflowing onto the wall panels and the bath-mat. It was perfect.

He pulled on his jacket and opened the door.

"Edyth! Hurry, dearest!" The words were on the tip of his

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tongue, but her arrival forestalled them. She came shrinking in, her blue dressing-gown strained round her thin body, her hair thrust into an unbecoming bath-cap.

"Oh Ronald!" she said, staring at the display, aghast. "Won't it make an awful mess? Goodness! All over the floor!"

Her hesitation infuriated him. "That won't matter," he said savagely. "You get in while the virtue of the foam is still there. Hurry. Meanwhile, I'll go and change. I'll give you ten minutes. Get straight in and lie down. It'll take some of the sallowness out of that skin of yours."

He went out and paused, listening. She locked the door as he had known she would. The habit of a lifetime does not suddenly change with marriage. He heard the bolt slide home and forced himself to walk slowly down the passage. He gave her sixty seconds. Thirty to take off her things and thirty to hesitate on the brink of the rosy mass.

"How is it?" he shouted from the linen-cupboard doorway.

She did not answer at once, and the sweat broke out on his forehead. Then he heard her. "I don't know yet. I'm only just in. It smells lovely."

He did not wait for the final word; his hand, wrapped in his handkerchief, had found the main switch again.

"One, two . . . three," he said with horrible prosaicness, and pulled it down.

From the wall-socket behind him there was a single spluttering flare as the fuse went, and then silence.

All round Ronald it was so quiet that he could hear the pulses in his own body, the far-away tick of a clock at the bottom of the stairs, the dreary buzzing of a fly imprisoned against the window glass, and from the garden next door, the drone of a mower as the heavy, fresh-faced man who had moved there performed his weekly chore shaving the little green lawn.

But from the bathroom there was no sound at all.

After a while he crept back along the passage and tapped at the door.

"Edyth!"

No. There was no response, no sound, nothing.

"Edyth!" he said again.

The silence was complete, and after a long minute he straightened his back and let out a deep sighing breath.

Almost at once he was keyed up again in preparation for the second phase. As he well knew, this next was the tricky period. The discovery of the body had got to be made but not too soon. He had made that mistake after Dorothy's "accident" and had

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actually been asked by the local inspector why he had taken alarm so soon, but he had kept his head and the dangerous moment had flickered past.

This time he had made up his mind to wait for half an hour before he began to hammer loudly at the door, then to shout for a neighbour, and finally to force the lock. He had planned to stroll out to buy an evening paper in the interim, shouting his intention to do so to Edyth from the front step for any passer-by to hear, but as he walked back along the landing he knew there was something else he was going to do first.

Edyth's leather writing-case in which she kept all her private papers was in the bottom of her soft-topped canvas hatbox. She had really believed he had not known of its existence, he reflected bitterly. It was locked as he had discovered when he had at last located it and he had not prized the catch for fear of putting her on her guard, but now there was nothing to stop him.

He went softly into the bedroom and opened the wardrobe door. The case was exactly where he had last seen it, plump and promising, and his hands closed over it gratefully. The catch was a little more difficult than he had expected but he got it open at last and the orderly contents of the leather box came into view. At first sight it was all most satisfactory, far better than he had anticipated. There were bundles of savings certificates, one or two thick envelopes whose red seals suggested the offices of lawyers, and on top, ready for the taking, one of those familiar grey books which the Post Office issues to its savings-bank clients.

He opened it with shaking fingers and fluttered through the pages. Two thousand. The sum made him whistle. Two thousand two hundred and fifty. She must have paid in a decent dividend there. Two thousand three hundred. Then a drop as she had drawn out one hundred pounds for her trousseau. Two thousand two hundred.

He thought that was the final entry, but on turning the page saw that there was yet one other recorded transaction. It was less than a week old. He remembered the book coming back through the mail and how clever she had thought she was in smuggling the envelope out of sight.

He glanced at the written words and figures idly at first, but then, as his heart jolted in sudden panic, stared at them, his eyes prominent and glazed. She had taken almost all of it out. There it was in black and white: *September 4, Withdrawal two thousand one hundred and ninety-eight pounds.*

His first thought was that the money must still be there, in five-pound notes, perhaps, in one of the envelopes. He tore through

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them hastily, forgetting all caution in his anxiety. Papers, letters, certificates fell on the floor in confusion.

The envelope, addressed to himself, pulled him up short. It was new and freshly blotted, the name inscribed in Edyth's own unexpectedly firm hand: *Ronald Torbay Esq.* He wrenched it open and smoothed the single sheet of bond paper within The date, he noted in amazement, was only two days old.

Dear Ronald,

If you ever get this I am afraid it will prove a dreadful shock to you. For a long time I have been hoping that it might not be necessary to write it, but now your behaviour has forced me to face some very unpleasant possibilities.

I am afraid, Ronald, that in some ways you are very old-fashioned. Has it not occurred to you that any homely middle-aged woman who has been swept into a hasty marriage to a stranger must, unless she is a perfect idiot, be just a little suspicious and touchy on the subject of *baths*?

Your predecessor, George Joseph Smith, and his Brides are not entirely forgotten, you know.

Frankly, I did not want to suspect you, because for a long time I thought I was in love with you, but when you persuaded me to make my will on our wedding day I could not help wondering, and then, as soon as you started fussing about the bathroom in this house, I thought I had better do something about it rather quickly. I am old-fashioned, too, so I went to the police.

Have you noticed that the people who have moved into the house next door have never tried to speak to you? We thought it best that I should merely talk to the woman over the garden wall, and it is she who has shown me the two cuttings from old provincial newspapers, each about women who met with fatal accidents in bubble-baths soon after their marriages. In each case there was a press snapshot of the husband taken at the funeral.

They are not very clear, but as soon as I saw them I realized it was my duty to agree to the course suggested to me by the Inspector who has been looking for a man answering that description for three years, ever since the two photographs were brought to his notice by your poor second wife's brother.

What I am trying to say is this: if you should ever lose me, Ronald, out of the bathroom I mean, you will find that I have gone out over the roof and am sitting in my dressing-gown in the kitchen next door. I was a fool to marry you but not quite such a fool as you assumed. Women may be

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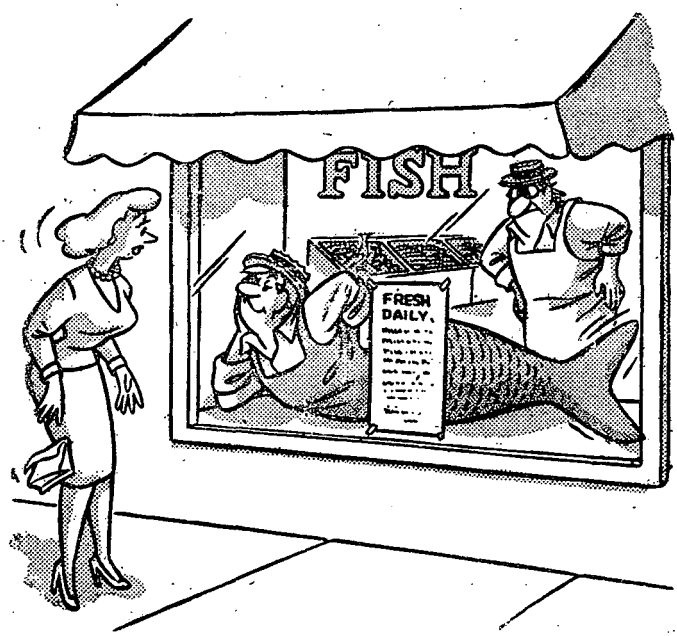
silly but they are not so stupid as they used to be. We are picking up the idea, Ronald.

Yours, Edyth.

P.S.—On rereading this note I see that in my nervousness I have forgotten to mention that the new people next door are not a married couple but Inspector Batsford of the C.I.D. and his assistant, Policewoman Richards. They assure me that there cannot be sufficient evidence to convict if you are not permitted to attempt the crime again. That is why I am forcing myself to be brave and play my part for I am very sorry for those other poor wives of yours, Ronald. They must have found you as fascinating as I did.

With his slit mouth twisted into an abominable O, Ronald Torbay raised haggard eyes from the letter.

The house was still quiet, and even the whine of the mower in the next-door garden had ceased. In the hush he heard a sudden clatter as the back door burst open and heavy footsteps raced through the hall and up the stairs towards him.

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# LION with a DELICATE AIR

by PENELOPE HUGHES

A LITTLE girl sat on the bank of a stream where it passed her cottage in Meadow Row, waiting to feed the ducks. The garden of the Big House lay beyond. The Big House was empty now, and its gardens long since deserted and overgrown; but an old drake still survived there with his twenty grandchildren and great-grandchildren about him; and the Welsh village children fed them when they came out.

The garden was very quiet and dark. The stream ran into it through a hole under a high wall: that was the only way in now, for the locked gates had long ago rusted solid. Her brother kept mice in there, in a box under a long-subsided wheelbarrow. She began to tell herself out loud: "There was once a little girl who was NOT afraid of mice . . ." Then with her finger she drew an exclamation-mark on the mud bank beside her; signed it, *Barbara Griffith aged* 10½, and yawned . . .

"No electric again tonight, I suppose," Mrs. Evans was saying gloomily, behind the bar. "And for why? That daft Simmy's up to the circus at St. Vitus, fitting out lights for them lions."

She set a pint of bitter in front of Jeremiah Jenkins, the huge old man in the corner with the great ruff of Edwardian whiskers.

"Three nights we been without, here; and Auntie Doreen groping about for her teeth, grumbling and saying nothing all evening yesterday. No consideration, that Simmy."

A small shadow suddenly blotted out the square of sunshine that the setting sun sent slanting in from the porch of the Black Lion. It was Billy, Barbara's brother.

"I know where your Auntie's teeth is!" said Billy, standing in the doorway, peeping.

"Where, then? —Tell me, cariad bach."

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" We *hate* her! " he cried, and ran off down the hill. He had seen what he wanted: Jeremiah was there all right. Billy's mice needed a treat; and that meant a raid on Jeremiah's shack, for cheese.

In the bar parlour they were back on the subject of the circus. " Simmy was telling me there's one lion very delicate in his manners," said Trevor. " Catching moths he is while the others are roaring for their dinners. Oh, proper girlish he is . . ."

But at that point Trevor was interrupted; a little man not local at all hurried in, and flopped down panting, calling for whisky.

" What's up, boyo? " asked Trevor.

" My lions have got out! Not one left to me, when I got back today. Terrible, it is! "

Terrible it was. They had another whisky all round.

" How did it happen?—Did you leave the door open, man? "

" Well, suppose I must have."

" Not a *black* lion, was it? " But the lion-tamer only looked more and more miserable.

" Is it sure you are they are gone? Could they be hiding there somewhere? " old Jeremiah asked, consolingly.

" Let's go and look, boys. Perhaps they are in there all the time," said Dai Bread.

At that everyone except Jeremiah moved towards the door, colliding there; then out onto the pavement. A car stood at the kerb and they piled in.

" Nice to see our Simmy's lights, too," confided Will Wilkins to the man he was sitting on.

Trevor started the engine with an unnecessary roar. Then Dai Bread, seeing the bewildered face of the lion-tamer (whose car it was) peering in through the window, cried, " There's room for one more yet! " and hauled him in too.

The car zigzagged off, backfiring, in the direction of St. Vitus. Soon it was out of sight, and out of hearing.

The sign of the Black Lion—he looked almost as fierce as a strawberry—began to creak slowly. The cherry trees along the High Street were nearly over; their fallen blossoms kept company with an old yellowed newspaper which went blowing along the pavement before the evening breeze, then suddenly sidled towards the door of the inn. Behind it, walking solemnly down the empty street, came a lion. He paused, and sniffed at a little heap of crumbled stucco outside the Georgian porch, then turned and loped off down the hill.

He reached Meadow Row. The ducks had come out: they were sitting together at the end of Meadow Row; as the lion

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passed they stirred their feet in the dust and hissed gently at him, and when he had gone they wagged their heads a little and closed their eyes again.

There was no one else about in Meadow Row to disapprove of him. But when he turned the corner at the far end he came on a whole party of children who had been running races, and were lying, hot and panting, beside the stream. The lion stopped and stared at them, and they stared back.

Then he continued downstream along the bank, till he came to the wall of the locked garden. The children still watched him. The wall was as high as a tall man; but with an effort he jumped onto it and over, landing the other side on a rubbish heap.

Children's heads appeared, peering through the hole where the stream came through. He picked his way amongst a glitter of glass and old tins till he came on what had once been a bed of pansies. With an almost human sigh of pleasure he lowered his belly onto them. The rays of the setting sun warmed his ribs, there was a cloud of gnats hovering over the grass, and a warm and crumbly smell about the wall behind. He slept.

When Billy Griffith had left the Black Lion, he made his way at once to Jeremiah's shack, planning the Saturday-night treat of cheese he was going to get for his mice. This shack was in the lower part of the town, built against the seaward wall of the Big Garden. Billy moved a loose board at the back and wriggled in.

The shed was chocked up with planks, paint-pots, pawn-tickets, and worn-out boots: some of the planks had parts of poems pencilled on them, in Welsh. About half the shed was filled by a great iron bed which was so large that Jeremiah had bought it cheap, because no one would have been able to get it up their stairs. Jeremiah had no stairs, but even so he had had to take down half his shack and build it up again round his bed.

It was in the bed that Billy began his rummaging, for Jeremiah always kept his food in there so that he did not have to grope around among the paint-pots for it in the morning.

But Billy could not, after all, find any cheese; only, after prolonged searching, half a chop. This he salvaged, then wriggled out again and climbed up onto the roof. In the far distance he saw Jeremiah come out of the Black Lion alone, and start down the hill. Hastily Billy swung himself up onto the wall of the Big Garden, and jumped down inside.

On his way through the garden to where his mice were kept, Billy saw the twinkle of several pairs of legs through the bushes, and guessed that the other children were up to something.

He pushed between the laurels towards them. Yes, there they were—and in their midst lay a lion. A rather decrepit lion,

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looking a bit like Jeremiah with his great ruff of yellowed Edwardian whiskers; and under his paw, held down flat on her back, was Billy's sister, Barbara.

The lion was still only half awake: he was yawning vastly. Billy was struck with astonishment as he saw the full expanse of his teeth. "My! those would make lovely False for Auntie Doreen," he murmured.

Then from the other side of the bushes there came a despairing wail, "Oh, *who* has been *sitting* on my pansies?" Myfanwy came bursting through the laurels indignantly.

"Old lion it was, Myfanwy," said a boy, pointing. "Lying on them we found him, snoring like an outboard. Dam' fool of a butterfly sat plumb on his nose and woke him up. Chased it he did. Then Barbie fell over and he caught her instead. Silly old basket!" he added defiantly.

At that moment the lion caught a whiff of the meat in Billy's hand. Billy had meant it for his mice, not for a strange lion, and hastily put it behind his back The lion got up and ambled towards him.

Then Billy realized how large it was: on all fours it stood easily up to his shoulder.

As soon as the lion moved, Barbara twisted onto her stomach and began to crawl away. But in a trice the lion caught her and rolled her neatly onto her back again with a flip of his paw. Barbara, quite unhurt but unable even to wriggle, stuck out her tongue at the lion as a gesture of defiance; and he peered down at her reproachfully.

Memories of almost painful vividness began to dance in her head. She thought of the cart-horses in the farm opposite the school, which they talked to every break. There was one fierce old brute called Dragon, who bit—and Billy used up all his toffee giving it him to chew, so that his teeth stuck and he could not bite them any more.

Perhaps there was some toffee in her pocket now, that she could give to the lion. She wriggled; but the lion's claws began to hurt her through her dress. Probably lions did not like toffees anyway. Suddenly she thought of her mother.

At that moment Barbara's mother, polishing her cottage banisters in Meadow Row, heard the padding of solemn feet in her kitchen. The ducks had come in—not to steal, just to remind the children that they had not been fed. Mrs. Griffith snatched the baby's crust and threw it into the river for them. When she came back the baby was eating a raw onion.

"Ducks in the kitchen, Baby eating onions when he should be in bed, and Barbie nowhere—what a life!" she exclaimed.

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A night mist had risen from the river now and hung over the meadow, blotting out everything but treetops and roofs, which seemed to hang suspended above it. The ducks, squabbling noisily over the crust, swam away under the wall into the Big Garden. From far out in the dusk where the stream met the tide came the cry of a curlew; the squabbling of the ducks reached the children in the garden from very far away, through the mist.

Barbara began whispering to herself again, "Once upon a time there was a little girl who wasn't at all afraid of mice . . ."

She wanted to turn round and look for Billy. Her dress was torn. The lion's paw was squashing her.

She began again desperately, "Once upon there was a little girl who wasn't at all afraid of . . . lions." And then she stopped quickly, for the lion's tail had begun to twitch.

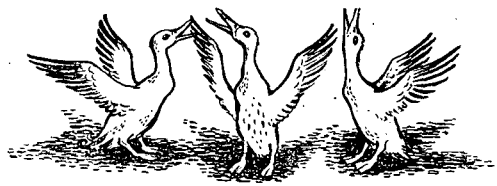
The children jumped back out of range of it. Tight almost to shouting-point with suspense, they began hopping from one foot to the other. The lion sniffed the air, then suddenly he roared. The child on the ground shook under him like a leaf, till the earth felt as if it would quake open and engulf her . . . and then quite unexpectedly the lion swung round and trotted off into the bushes.

Barbara stood up. "Well! What a funny little girl you are, to be afraid of *lions*!" she told herself, rather shakily.

The night wind, which was beginning to blow, brought a faint smell of frying chops from Jeremiah's shack. Jeremiah was back there now, cooking his supper. Across that side of the garden, where the shack lay, they saw the lion jump onto the top of the wall and down; and they heard the splintering of rotten wood.

The ducks suddenly all stood on their tails and began clapping their wings, clamouring loudly for no reason at all.

*Penelope Hughes is one of the youngest writers to have a story in Argosy. Still a student at Oxford, she is the daughter of Richard Hughes, author of "A High Wind in Jamaica." This is her first published story.*



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# A MILD ATTACK OF LOCUSTS

*The sun beat down, orange and distorted through the strange darkness*

## BY DORIS LESSING

THE rains that year were good, they were coming nicely just as the crops needed them—or so Margaret gathered when the men said they were not too bad. She never had an opinion of her own on matters like the weather, because even to know about what seems a simple thing like the weather needs experience. Which Margaret had not got.

The men were Richard her husband, and old Stephen, Richard's father, a farmer from way back, and these two might argue for hours whether the rains were ruinous, or just ordinarily exasperating. Margaret had been on the farm three years. She still did not understand why they did not go bankrupt altogether, when the men never had a good word for the weather, or the soil, or the Government. But she was getting to learn the language. Farmer's language. And they neither went bankrupt nor got very rich. They jogged along, doing comfortably.

Their crop was maize. Their farm was three thousand acres up the ridges that rise towards the Zambesi escarpment, high, dry, windswept country, cold and dusty in winter, but now, being the wet months, steamy with the heat rising in wet soft waves off miles of green foliage.

Beautiful it was, with the sky on fair days like blue and brilliant halls of air, and the bright green folds and hollows of country beneath, and the mountains lying sharp and bare twenty miles off across the rivers.

The sky made her eyes ache, she was not used to it. One does not look so much at the sky in the city she came from. So that evening when Richard said, " The Government is sending out warnings that locusts are expected, coming down from the breeding grounds up north," her instinct was to look about her at the trees. Insects—swarms of them—horrible!

But Richard and the old man had raised their eyes and were looking up over the mountain. " We haven't had locusts in seven

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years," they said. " They go in cycles, locusts do." And then, " There goes our crop for this season! "

But they went on with the work of the farm just as usual, until one day they were coming up the road to the homestead for the midday break, when old Stephen stopped, raised his finger, and pointed. " Look, look, there they are! "

Out ran Margaret to join them, looking at the hills. Out came the servants from the kitchen. They all stood and gazed. Over the rocky levels of the mountain was a streak of rust-coloured air. Locusts. There they came.

At once Richard shouted at the cook-boy. Old Stephen yelled at the house-boy. The cook-boy ran to beat the old ploughshare hanging from a tree-branch, which was used to summon the labourers at moments of crisis. The house-boy ran off to the store to collect tin cans, any old bit of metal. The farm was ringing with clamour of the gong, and they could see the labourers come pouring out of the compound, pointing at the hills and shouting excitedly. Soon they had all come up to the house, and Richard and old Stephen were giving them orders—Hurry, hurry, hurry.

And off they ran again, the two white men with them, and in a few minutes Margaret could see the smoke of fires rising from all around the farmlands. Piles of wood and grass had been prepared there. There were seven patches of bared soil, yellow and ox-blood-colour and pink, where the new mealies were just showing, making a film of bright green, and around each drifted up thick clouds of smoke. They were throwing wet leaves on to the fires now, to make it acrid and black. Margaret was watching the hills. Now there was a long low cloud advancing, rust-coloured still, swelling forward and out as she looked.

The telephone was ringing. Neighbours—Quick, quick, there come the locusts. Old Smith had had his crop eaten to the ground. Quick—get your fires started. For, of course, while every farmer hoped the locusts would overlook his farm and go on to the next, it was only fair to warn each other, one must play fair. Everywhere, fifty miles over the countryside, the smoke was rising from myriads of fires.

Margaret answered the telephone calls, and between stood watching the locusts. The air was darkening. A strange darkness, for the sun was blazing—it was like the darkness of a veld fire, when the air gets thick with smoke. The sunlight comes down distorted, a thick hot orange. Oppressive it was, too, with the heaviness of a storm.

The locusts were coming fast. Now half the sky was darkened. Behind the reddish veils in front which were the advance guards

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of the swarm, the main swarm showed in dense black cloud, reaching almost to the sun itself.

Margaret was wondering what she could do to help. She did not know. Then up came old Stephen from the lands. "We're finished, Margaret, finished! Those beggars can eat every leaf and blade off the farm in half an hour! And it's only early afternoon—if we can make enough smoke, make enough noise till the sun goes down, they'll settle somewhere else perhaps . . ." And then, "Get the kettle going. It's thirsty work, this."

So Margaret went to the kitchen, and stoked up the fire, and boiled the water.

Now, on the tin roof of the kitchen she could hear the thuds and bangs of falling locusts, or a scratching slither as one skidded down. Here were the first of them. From down on the lands came the beating and banging and clanging of a hundred petrol tins and bits of metal.

Stephen impatiently waited while one petrol tin was filled with tea, hot, sweet, and orange-coloured, and the other with water. In the meantime, he told Margaret about how twenty years back he was eaten out, made bankrupt by the locust armies. And then, still talking, he hoisted up the petrol cans, one in each hand, by the wood pieces set corner-wise across each, and jogged off down to the road to the thirsty labourers.

By now the locusts were falling like hail on to the roof of the kitchen. It sounded like a heavy storm.

Margaret looked out and saw the air dark with a criss-cross of the insects, and she set her teeth and ran out into it—what the men could do, she could. Overhead the air was thick, locusts everywhere. The locusts were flopping against her, and she brushed them off, heavy red-brown creatures, looking at her with their beady old-men's eyes while they clung with hard serrated legs. She held her breath with disgust and ran through into the house. There it was even more like being in a heavy storm. The iron roof was reverberating, and the clamour of iron from the lands was like thunder.

Outside, all the trees were queer and still, clotted with insects, their boughs weighed to the ground. The earth seemed to be moving, locusts crawling everywhere, she could not see the lands at all, so thick was the swarm. Towards the mountains it was like looking into driving rain—even as she watched, the sun was blotted out with a fresh onrush of them. It was a half-night, a perverted blackness. Then came a sharp crack from the bush—a branch had snapped off. Then another. A tree down the slope leaned over, and settled heavily to the ground.

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Through the hail of insects a man came running. More tea, more water was needed. She supplied them. She kept the fires stoked and filled tins with liquid, and then it was four in the afternoon, and the locusts had been pouring across overhead for a couple of hours.

Up came old Stephen again, crunching locusts underfoot with every step, locusts clinging all over him, cursing and swearing, banging with his old hat at the air. At the doorway he stopped briefly, hastily pulling at the clinging insects and throwing them off, then he plunged into the locust-free living-room.

"All the crops finished. Nothing left," he said.

But the gongs were still beating, the men still shouting, and Margaret asked, "Why do you go on with it, then?"

"The main swarm isn't settling. They are heavy with eggs. They are looking for a place to settle and lay. If we can stop the main body settling on our farm, that's everything. If they get a chance to lay their eggs, we're going to have everything eaten flat with hoppers later on." He picked a stray locust off his shirt, and split it down with his thumb nail—it was clotted inside with eggs. "Imagine that multiplied by millions. You ever seen a hopper swarm on the march? Well, you're lucky."

Margaret thought an adult swarm was bad enough. Outside now the light on the earth was a pale thin yellow, clotted with moving shadow, the clouds of moving insects thickened and lightened like driving rain. Old Stephen said, "They've got the wind behind them, that's something."

"Is it very bad?" asked Margaret fearfully, and the old man said emphatically, "We're finished. This swarm may pass over, but once they've started, they'll be coming down from the north now one after another. And then there are the hoppers—it might go on for two or three years."

Margaret sat down helplessly and thought, "Well, if it's the end, it's the end. What now? We'll all three have to go back to town . . ." But at this, she took a quick look at Stephen, the old man who had farmed forty years in this country, been bankrupt twice, and she knew nothing would make him go and become a clerk in the city. Yet her heart ached for him, he looked so tired, the worry-lines deep from nose to mouth. Poor old man . . . He had lifted up a locust that had got itself somehow into his pocket, holding it in the air by one leg.

"You've got the strength of a steel spring in those legs of yours," he was telling the locust, good-humouredly. Then, although he had been fighting locusts, squashing locusts, yelling at locusts, sweeping them in great mounds into the fires to burn for the last three hours, nevertheless he took this one to the door,

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and carefully threw it out to join its fellows as if he would rather not harm a hair of its head.

This comforted Margaret, all at once she felt irrationally cheered. She remembered it was not the first time in the last three years the men had announced their final and irremediable ruin.

"Get me a drink, lass," he then said, and she set the bottle of whisky by him.

In the meantime, out in the pelting storm of insects, her husband was banging the gong, feeding the fires with leaves, the insects clinging to him all over. She shuddered.

"How can you bear to let them touch you?" she asked. He looked at her, disapproving. She felt suitably humble—just as she had when he had first taken a good look at her city self, hair waved and golden, nails red and pointed. Now she was a proper farmer's wife, in sensible shoes and a solid skirt. She might even get to letting locusts settle on her—in time.

Having tossed back a whisky or two, old Stephen went back into the battle, wading now through glistening brown waves of locusts.

Five o'clock. The sun would set in an hour. Then the swarm would settle. It was as thick overhead as ever The trees were ragged mounds of glistening brown.

Margaret began to cry. It was all so hopeless—if it wasn't a bad season, it was locusts, if it wasn't locusts, it was army-worm or veld fires. Always something.

The rustling of the locust armies was like a big forest in a storm, their settling on the roof was like the beating of the rain, the ground was invisible in a sleek brown surging tide—it was like being drowned in locusts, submerged by the loathsome brown flood. It seemed as if the roof might sink in under the weight of them, as if the door might give in under their pressure and these rooms fill with them—and it was getting so dark . . .

She looked up. The air was thinner, gaps of blue showed in the dark moving clouds. The blue spaces were cold and thin: the sun must be setting. Through the fog of insects she saw figures approaching. First old Stephen, marching bravely along, then her husband, drawn and haggard with weariness. Behind them the servants. All were crawling all over with insects. The sound of the gongs had stopped. She could hear nothing but the ceaseless rustle of a myriad wings.

The two men slapped off the insects and came in.

"Well," said Richard, kissing her on the cheek, "the main swarm has gone over."

"For the lord's sake," said Margaret angrily, still half crying,

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" what's here is bad enough, isn't it? " For although the evening air was no longer black and thick, but a clear blue, with a pattern of insects whizzing this way and that across it, everything else—trees, buildings, bushes, earth—was gone under the moving brown masses.

" If it doesn't rain in the night and keep them here—if it doesn't rain and weigh them down with water, they'll be off in the morning at sunrise."

" We're bound to have some hoppers. But not the main swarm, that's something."

Margaret roused herself, wiped her eyes, pretended she had not been crying, and fetched them some supper, for the servants were too exhausted to move. She sent them down to the compound to rest. She served the supper and sat listening. There is not one maize plant left, she heard. Not one. The men would get the planters out the moment the locusts have gone. They must start all over again.

But what's the use of that, Margaret wondered, if the whole farm was going to be crawling with hoppers? But she listened while they discussed the new Government pamphlet which said how to defeat the hoppers. You must have men out all the time moving over the farm to watch for movement in the grass. When you find a patch of hoppers, small lively black things, like crickets, then you dig trenches around the patch, or spray them with poison from pumps supplied by the Government. The Government wanted them to co-operate in a world plan for eliminating this plague for ever. You should attack locusts at the source. Hoppers, in short. The men were talking as if they were planning a war, and Margaret listened, amazed.

In the night it was quiet, no sign of the settled armies outside, except sometimes a branch snapped, or a tree could be heard crashing down. Margaret slept badly in the bed beside Richard, who was sleeping like the dead, exhausted with the afternoon's fight. In the morning she woke to yellow sunshine lying across the bed, clear sunshine, with an occasional blotch of shadow moving over it.

She went to the window. Old Stephen was ahead of her. There he stood outside, gazing down over the bush. And she gazed, astounded—and entranced, much against her will. For it looked as if every tree, every bush, all the earth were lit with pale flames. The locusts were fanning their wings to free them of the night dews. There was a shimmer of red-tinged gold light everywhere.

She went out to join the old man, stepping carefully among the

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insects. They stood and watched. Overhead the sky was blue, blue and clear.

"Pretty," said old Stephen, with satisfaction.

Well, thought Margaret, we may be ruined, we may be bankrupt, but not everyone has seen a locust army fanning their wings at dawn.

Over the slopes, in the distance, a faint red smear showed in the sky. It thickened and spread.

"There they go" said old Stephen. "There goes the main army, off south."

And now, from the trees, from the earth all round them, the locusts were taking wing. They were like small aircraft, manœuvring for the take-off, trying their wings to see if they were dry enough. Off they went. A reddish-brown steam was rising off the miles of bush, off the lands, the earth. Again the sunlight darkened.

And as the clotted branches lifted, the weight on them lightening, there was nothing but the black spines of branches, trees. No green left, nothing. All morning they watched, the three of them, as the brown crust thinned and broke and dissolved, flying up to mass with the main army, now a brownish-red smear in the southern sky.

The lands which had been filmed with green, the new tender mealie plants, were stark and bare. All the trees stripped. A devastated landscape. No green, no green anywhere.

By midday the reddish cloud had gone. Only an occasional locust flopped down.

On the ground were the corpses and the wounded. The African labourers were sweeping these up with branches and collecting them in tins.

"Ever eaten sun-dried locust?" asked old Stephen. "That time twenty years ago, when I went broke, I lived on mealie-meal and dried locusts for three months. They aren't bad at all—rather like smoked fish, if you come to think of it."

But Margaret preferred not even to think of it.

After the midday meal the men went off to the lands. Everything was to be replanted. With a bit of luck another swarm would not come travelling down just this way. But they hoped it would rain very soon, to spring some new grass, because the cattle would die otherwise—there was not a blade of grass left on the farm.

As for Margaret, she was trying to get used to the idea of three or four years of locusts. Locusts were going to be like the weather, from now on, always imminent. She felt like a survivor

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after war—if this devastated and mangled countryside was not ruin, well, what then was ruin?

But the men ate their supper with good appetites.

"It could have been worse," was what they said. "It could be much worse."


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ON SALE JULY 10


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# MODEL WIFE

*" I don't fancy going to bed with a string of pearls," he said*

## BY JOAN AIKEN

IT was her pearls that caused the first fight between Dan Thomas and Shani Hughes. They were bound to quarrel anyway, for love and hate boiled between them like treacle and brimstone, but the pearls were at the bottom of it all.

As soon as Dan set eyes on Shani he swore he'd marry her. Dan was a house-painter by trade, and he lived in a cottage up the mountain, the small white one all by itself, with his ladder and his cherry trees and four mountainy cows. Far afield he often travelled, painting men's houses and their barns and wagons or doing a bit of sign-writing, as far afield as Grass Street or Hickson's Hill, for he had a motor scooter that carried him and his gear up the hill roads and through the black belts of forest.

He could do the bold sweep or the tiny detail, paint you roses and curlicues, or finish the west wall of a barn in a day and a half. He bought his groceries wherever he chanced to put on his brakes, so his home village saw him rarely, and Shani, who worked in her Da's dairy, never at all, until the day when the dairy shutters fell down once too often and old Idris Hughes, meeting Dan in the street, ordered a new pair, tongued and grooved and painted with all the beauties that Dan could devise.

A beautiful job he made of them, too, background all green and white and a galaxy of winsome Jerseys, the goodness shining in their eyes like glycerine, a wreath of roses round each pedigree neck, and silver buckets beside them foaming like an espresso-man's dream. But Dan felt that something was lacking and he stamped off down to the village for a conference with old Hughes.

" We need a milkmaid," he shouted before he was halfway inside the door, and then he stopped, for Shani was there, pretty as a bunch of grapes in her green and white stripes, innocent and wild.

She and Dan stared at one another like a couple of cats, and straightway Dan said, " You're the one I want."

" Want for what, pray? " and she went on patting the butter

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into swans with her butterpats. But the look she gave him was about as simple as the battlefield of Waterloo.

"Want you to sit for me as a model," Dan said, passing a hand over his forehead.

"I'll have to ask my Da about that."

In came old Idris just then and she said to him, "Da, Mr. Thomas wants to paint me."

"Modelling fees," grunted Idris Hughes, and Dan nodded. He knew a bargain when he saw one.

Shani preened herself a bit and said, "When shall I come?"

"This evening."

So every evening after work Dan came down and painted her in the dairy, and the milkmaid portrait was the first of many. Shani was small, and she was handsome, but fierce as a wasp, for her mother had died when she was a baby and her Da was too busy making money in his dairy to attend to her. She didn't know what it was to be crossed, and he had never put her over his knee and spanked her in his life. Most of the young men in the village thought Dan had bitten off a worse mouthful than Puss when she swallowed the grasshopper.

"What's that?" said Dan, the first evening, painting away. She was fidgeting with something at her neck.

"My pearls," said Shani.

"Tuck them out of sight."

"But they're real pearls!" she said, shocked. "My Da's given me one every year of my life and they're as large as nasturtium seeds."

"I don't care if they're as big as butter-beans. Dairymaids don't wear pearls."

Shani saw the force of this and she tucked them out of sight under her dress, but the minute painting was done for the evening, out they came again, and she told him, "It's good for pearls to wear them, I read so in the paper. It keeps them lustrous and shining. I've never taken them off since I was born."

"Do you wear them in the bath?" asked Dan, with curiosity.

"In the bath, yes."

"And in bed?" he asked, screwing up his tubes.

"In bed, of course."

"Well! I can tell you one night you won't wear them."

"And what night's that?"

"The night we're wedded," snapped Dan. "I don't fancy going to bed with a string of pearls. Damn it, I wouldn't get a wink of sleep, worrying in case the thing got broken. Pearls in bed would be worse than cake-crumbs."

"You'll have to get used to them, just the same," flashed back

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Shani. " I've never taken them off yet, and I'm not going to begin for you."

Then they took breath and eyed one another, and Dan put his brushes carefully into the turpentine and came over to the counter and gave Shani a kiss that lasted for seven and a half minutes, nonstop, and so concentrated that if they'd been inside a pressure-cooker the gauge would have been hopping up and down in the thousands.

Then he stopped and shook her and said, " You'll take them off."

" I will not! " retorted Shani, but she added, " When shall we get married? "

" In April, when my cherry trees are in flower." For he was a tidy-minded man and he reasoned that three months would be time enough to get the notion out of her head.

He was wrong, though. From February to April, while the lambs tittupped round their mothers on the slopes and the crocuses began to prink and peer in Dan's garden, dispute flowed between them like a stream in spate. Shani clamoured that she'd wear her virginity the whole of her life sooner than take off those pearls, while Dan shouted that he'd jump off the side of the mountain before he'd wed a girl who thought more of a string of beads than she did of her lover.

The wedding date drew near, and neither had given way an inch. Both secretly hoped that some middle way could be found, for the plain truth was that, rage how they might, they could not keep apart; but Dan became black and thunderous, and Shani as frosty and brilliant with pride as a raised sword. When they were not kissing, fierce words flew between them like showers of darts.

April came, windy and sunny, and the wedding was celebrated with splendour, for old Idris Hughes was the richest man in the village and Dan had put by a tidy pile, too, with his painting. The wedding breakfast was to be held in Dan's cottage for the guests to view the glory of his cherry trees, first out on the mountain. As they climbed the steep track the house hung above them, white in a cloud of white, like an egg in a nest of feathers.

" You'll take the pearls off for me tonight, won't you, Shani fach? " said Dan as they strolled up over the grass, and he put his arm round her white silk shoulders.

" Indeed and I will not," she snorted. " You can have me in my pearls or you won't have me at all. If you don't like it you can bed yourself in the linhay."

Dan unwound his arm and went on ahead, with jutting brows

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and a mouth like a ruler, to see to the kettle. The guests crowded after him, gay and curious, into his cottage where many of them had never been before.

All was sanded, spruce, and clean, pots shining like silver, and curtains snowy and smooth. A grand breakfast was laid out on the table, but the guests had eyes for one thing only, and that was a portrait of a fine red-headed wench with eyes like plums and not a stitch of clothes on. The paint was wet, the picture only half finished, and it was plain that Dan must have been painting away at it not half an hour before the wedding.

Murmurs and shocked whispers rose up from the party. "What a hussy! Who is she? Never seen her in the village. Posing in the altogether for him she must have been, not two hours ago. Some stranger from the town she must be. Shameless it is, on his wedding morning."

"Kettle's boiled," said Dan, coming in, brisk and friendly, from the kitchen. "I'll just clear these things into the attic." And he stuck the brushes in a jam-jar, picked up easel and palette, and disappeared for a moment. When he came back he carried a tray with tea, whisky, and brandy.

"Set to, neighbours," he said, and they, remembering the noble meal spread, thought no more of the picture but ate, drank, and joked, while Dan moved among them seeing that each had his need and paying no attention to his bride who stood bristling in her finery, nearly choked with indignation.

At length the last guest was fed and sped. Dan waved them all off down the steep track.

"Come now," he said. "Walk a bit under the cherry trees, is it, before dark falls?" They were gleaming in the dusk like paper mountains.

"Not a step do I stir," said Shani between her teeth, "till you tell me where you have hidden that good-for-nothing red-headed slut so that I can tear the eyes out of her. Posing on your wedding morning, indeed, with not an inch of cloth to cover her shame! Is it a fool you take me for, Dan Thomas?"

"Indeed, it was only an old page of an illustrated paper I copied her from," Dan said, careless, but there was a guilty note in his voice.

"Tell that to the crows! As if the neighbours would believe such a story. And if you copied it, where have you put the paper?"

"Oh," said Dan, "I tore it up to light the fire for the kettle." And he hummed a bit of tune.

Shani hunted high and low through the length and breadth of the cottage and the orchard and meadow, but not a trace of the

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intruder could she find. Presently she began to tire. It was a strange way, after all, to spend her wedding evening.

" Tell me it was all a joke now, Danny bach? " she coaxed, coming back to him where he sat in the kitchen, toes to the blaze.

" If I tell you, will you do something for me? " he said, pulling her onto his knee.

" What would that be? " She let her head drop on his shoulder.

" Take those oysters' gallstones off."

She shot up like an electric eel. " And have you give them to the red-headed piece, I suppose," she threw at him. " I'll keep these pearls on till my dying day."

" As long as you do you can have a bed to yourself," growled Dan, and he gathered up an armful of blankets and made himself a snug bed in the linhay, while Shani fumed herself to sleep in the best room with its patchwork quilt that Dan's granny had made him.

In the morning when she came down, Dan had the breakfast ready and served her as if she had been the Queen herself, but she noticed that the picture of the red-headed girl had been brought down and hung up on the wall.

And moreover, another of the legs had been painted in, and three fingers of the right hand.

Shani said not a word, but she resolved to find the model if it took her a year of searching. Polite as pie she was to Dan, and he to her.

Days went by, and the cherry blossom began to tarnish and scatter. Shani soon found that there was not enough to occupy her in the cottage, for it was a small one, and Dan was out all of most days. So she took to helping her Da in the dairy again. Sometimes, when she came home, she would notice that Dan had been back early, and had painted a bit more of the redhead, perhaps a piece of her thigh, or half an arm, or he had touched up the highlight on her knee.

But though fury boiled in Shani, pride kept her lips sealed. Only her eyes snapped and sparkled as they darted over the cottage to see if she could find any trace of her rival, a handkerchief or a hairpin, or even a breath of scent. Never a clue did she find, though, and she began to wonder if the red-haired girl walked naked over the mountain to Dan, making the very sheep blush as they nibbled. Wild dreams haunted her, of shameless, mocking Venuses, and she tossed and turned under the patchwork quilt, while Dan, still sleeping in the linhay, fed load after load of hay to his cows and watched the level get lower and lower. Hard sleeping it would be, soon.

Matters were in this state when the circus from Grass Street

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came toiling up the slopes of the mountain, to camp in the meadow beyond Shani's Da's dairy.

Splendid it was, with a great tent like a piece of white cloud, scarlet-capped elephants, horses with plumes, and all the caravans of the circus folk scattered up and down the meadow painted and decorated as gay as butterflies.

The first that Shani knew of it was the strong man coming into the dairy to ask for his day's ration of three gallons of milk. He gazed at Shani admiringly as she dipped out the milk with her brass dipper. Thin she had grown from searching and pondering, but her cheeks were as pink and her eyes as bright as they had ever been.

"Grand you'd do to be fired from the cannon in the circus tonight," said the strong man. "Our Miss Lightning has the lumbago. Why, you're so light and pretty you'd fly through the air like a thistleblow."

"My husband would never let me," said Shani, but then she thought: Why shouldn't I, just the same? What do I care for him? So she told the strong man she'd come round to the ringmaster's caravan to talk about it.

Mr. Blossom was in his shirtsleeves smoking, and he too looked at Shani with admiration. He asked her in for a cup of tea and showed her how to sit with her arms linked round her knees while she was fired from the cannon.

But while he spoke Shani hardly listened, for on his wall was a picture of a woman, decently dressed, but still and for all that the identical red-headed baggage that Dan had painted.

"Who's that?" Shani asked when she could get a word in.

"That?" said Blossom sadly. "That's my poor dear wife, Mrs. Blossom."

"Where is she?" demanded Shani, with her fingers tearing feathers out of the cushion.

"She ran away with the tiger-tamer," Mr. Blossom sighed.

"And now she's running after my husband. With no clothes on!"

"She couldn't be doing that," Mr. Blossom said. "She's been dead these twenty years. One of the tigers got her, poor Blodwen."

"Then how could my husband have painted her picture? With no clothes on?"

"Copied it from somewhere, he must have indeed. Many a picture and likeness used to be taken of my Blodwen. Very beautiful, an artists' model, she was, see? Here's one of her on a toffee tin, and one on a calendar in a crinoline, and here she is before she had her hair cut short."

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" And you let her pose like *that*? " Shani said, shocked to the mortal soul.

" Before we were married, that one was. Afterwards she always wore the crinoline."

Shani began to feel bad. She had wronged Dan, suspecting him of carrying on with a woman twenty years in the tiger's stomach. But then she thought: He did it to torment me. And she hardened against him and went with Mr. Blossom to learn how to be fired from the cannon, for she was sure that would enrage Dan.

Home at dinner-time she saw that Dan had painted a wreath of daisies round the redhead's neck.

" Take me to the circus tonight, Danny, is it? " she said at dinner, friendly as butter.

" All right," Dan said. " Eat up, girl. Thin as a rake you're growing."

Shani couldn't wait to tell him her news. " Fired from a cannon I'm going to be," she said. " With the mayor and all the neighbours watching. A great honour it is."

" I forbid it! " Dan shouted, banging on the table.

" If I promise not to, will you tell me the gospel truth about that picture? " Shani asked, looking at him with bright eyes.

" If I tell you the truth about the picture, will you take off your pearls for me? "

" Never before I'm in my coffin," stormed Shani.

They parted on evil terms, and Shani went to the circus by herself, but nevertheless Dan was there, too, sitting on a front bench, and Shani saw him and smiled with malice. Dressed all in black she was, in a boiler-suit with a zip from top to toe like a city girl, and round her neck she wore the pearls, shining away like a row of false teeth.

Be damned to her, thought Dan, and he thrust his hands in his pockets and stared moodily at the sawdust.

Outside, night had fallen over the mountain, and the June darkness was as fragrant and spicy as a kitchenful of cloves; red-hot coals of stars blazed overhead.

Drums thundered and trumpets brayed as Shani sat with her hands clasped round her knees and they dropped her into the black mouth of the cannon.

" Stop! " shouted Dan at the last moment. " I can't stand it! " and he rushed forward, but it was too late.

Mr. Blossom had pulled the trigger as Dan arrived, and between them they tipped the barrel upwards and Shani was fired straight at the tent roof.

Up, up she soared, and the ancient thin canvas parted with a

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rending crack as she passed through. She vanished, and the stars received her

"Quick! outside to catch her," cried Blossom, and they poured out into the meadow, but though they searched every inch of ground and found a scattering of pearls, there was never a sign of Shani. "Gone up to heaven she has, direct," they told Dan. "Ah, lucky you were, Thomas, to have a wife that saintly. Honour's been done you, indeed to goodness."

"Compensation I'll have for this," wept Dan, tearing his hair. "She was dearer to me than my right arm, and in another couple of months I'd have tamed her."

"Never mind," they said, comforting him, "better so," and they all went to Blossom's caravan for a drink to drown the solemn thought of Shani, body and all, being lifted up to paradise.

After a while Dan stopped talking about compensation, as he thought of all the trouble he'd had with Shani, and his prickly nights in the linhay. "Women are all the same," said Mr. Blossom. "They come and they go. Eaten by tigers or fired out of guns, they're always up to some mischief. It's a man's work that counts. That job you did painting my caravan now, that was a proper bit of work, beautiful. And no pay asked for it either, only an old picture of my Blodwen out of the *Gentleman's Weekly*. Ah, you'll go far, you will, young man."

"Yes, I'll go far," said Dan sadly, and he wandered out of the caravan, for it was late, and started off homewards under the huge stars. But because it was late, and he was tired and heartbroken, and could now sleep, if he liked, for ever under the patchwork quilt, he decided not to go home at all, but to spend the night on Shani's Da's haystack.

Up he climbed, on the feathery warmth of the new hay, and when he reached the top it seemed to him that he was not the only person on that haystack.

"Who's that?" whispered a voice, and he felt a groping hand in the dark. He caught hold of it, tight.

"Shani, is that you?" he asked, and astonishment tipped over the anger in his voice. "What are you doing up here on the stack, giving us all the fright of a lifetime?"

"It's my boiler-suit," said she, between a gulp and a sob. "Came unzippered it did, when I went through the canvas, and fell off onto the tent roof. And I've lost my pearls too. The old string broke on me and some of them fell into the hay. I've looked and looked and I can find only five. Waiting I was till all the people had gone home before I dared show myself."

"Broke, did it?" said Dan tenderly, turning her round and

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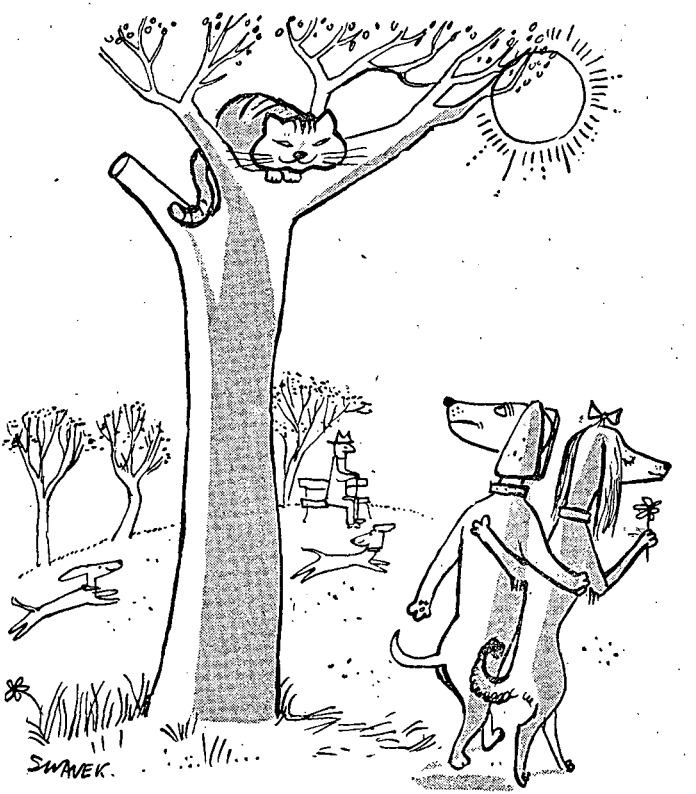
feeling her to make sure it was true. "Ah there, never mind the old bit of a necklace, Shani darling, is it? Don't cry then, my pet, my beautiful."

Finding her other hand clenched on the five pearls, he gently opened it and flung them over his shoulder. "Let your Da's cows eat them if they've a mind," he said. "We've better things to do than worry after a handful of beads." But because she still wept he promised to buy her another necklace.

Deep in its warmth the haystack held them, and if there were pearls in their bed they never noticed. Nightingales were singing and the stars flared like beacons overhead.

Tomorrow would be midsummer day.




*Peeping Tom, huh?*

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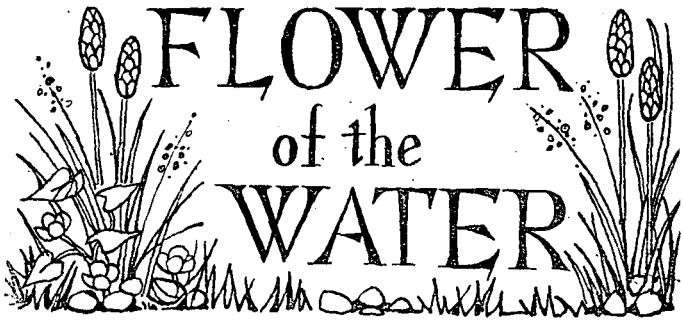


**Thus looks a Sea Nymph when she leaves**
**Her Bed, and rises from the Waves**

THOMAS SHIPMAN, 1632–1680

*Baths of Rome and Babylon,*
*Gleaming in the dusk,*
*Tepid water sweet with myrrh,*
*Violet and musk.*

*Baths of Rome and Babylon—*
*Lovely ladies there*
*Lazily drew amethyst*
*Brushes through their hair.*

JOHN HANLON MITCHELL, *A City Song*

## *Nymph of the Fountain*

Now without the town there spread a great forest, thick with trees, and through the forest ran a river. Towards this forest Graelent rode, deep in heavy thought, and very dolent. Having ridden for a little space beneath the trees, he spied within a leafy thicket a fair white hart, whiter even than snow on winter branches. The hart fled before him, and Graelent followed so closely in her track that man and deer presently came together to a grassy lawn, in the midst of which sprang a fountain of clear, sweet water.

Now in this fountain a demoiselle disported herself for her delight. Her raiment was set on a bush near by, and her two maidens stood on the bank, busied in their lady's service. Graelent forgot the chase at so sweet a sight since never in his life had he seen so lovely a dame. For the lady was slender in shape and white, very gracious and dainty of colour, with laughing eyes

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and an open brow—certainly the most beautiful thing in all the world. Graelent dared not draw nigh the fountain for fear of troubling the dame, so he came softly to the bush to set hands upon her raiment. The two maidens marked his approach, and at their fright the lady turned, and calling him by name, cried with great anger—

" Graelent, put my raiment down, for it will profit you little even if you carry it away, and leave me naked in this wood. But if you are indeed too greedy of gain to remember your knighthood, at least return me my shift, and content yourself with my mantle, since it will bring you money, as it is very good."

*The Lay of Graelent.*

## *Seascape*

*My lover never danced with me*
*Not minuet nor saraband*
*We walked (embracing) on the sand*

*My lover never swam with me*
*We waded to our ankle bones*
*And winced and shivered on the stones*

*My lover never flew with me*
*We stared at sea birds slicing space*
*and cried What freedom Look what grace*

*I wish my love had lain with me*
*Not on the sand beside the sea*
*But under my ailanthus tree.*

ISABELLE GARDNER, *Lines to a Seagreen Lover*

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## *Golden Girl*

He picked out the tallest larch-tree and climbed up to the top of it. He looked all round and saw a hill not far away, with a river running down the side of it. It was a small river, babbling merrily against the rocks and stones, but in one place it was shining so brightly that it quite dazzled his eyes. "What can it be?" he thought to himself. He looked again and there, sitting on a big white stone by some bushes, was a young girl of the most marvellous beauty. Her hair was thrown over her shoulder and dangled down in the water. It was the colour of gold, this hair of hers, and quite ten sazhens in length; and the reflection of it in the river was so brilliant that you could scarcely bear to look at it.

As Ailip was gazing at this girl, she suddenly raised her head and said: "Good day to you, Ailip! . . . It seems that you are the biggest and handsomest and strongest and cleverest of all the hunters. Will you marry me?"

"What payment would I have to give for you?"

"Payment! What question can there be of payment? My father owns all the gold there is . . ."

Ailip was beside himself with joy.

PAVEL BAZHOV, *The Malachite Casket, translated by Alan Moray Williams*

## *Secret of the Pool*

*Green-fingered dryad, break from your oak-tree!*
*Flash from your pool, blue nymph!*
*Leaves have whispered your secret, the sands have betrayed you,*
*Water-lilies have told of your hearts.*
*Cold and gold and green-gleamed white,*
*Deep-petalled, and pollened, as they:*
*These are your hearts. Come out, green-fingered!*
*Rise from your pool, blue nymph . . .*

CONRAD AIKEN, *The Divine Pilgrim*

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# M MOLECULE

*He had strange power*
*—but what was it*

## BY ROBERT SHECKLEY

HE returned to consciousness slowly, aware of aches and bruises, and an agonizing knot in his stomach. Experimentally, he stretched his legs. They didn't touch anything, and he realized that his body was unsupported. He was dead, he thought. Floating free in space.

Floating? He opened his eyes. Yes, he was floating. Above him was a ceiling—or was it a floor? He resisted a strong urge to scream, blinked, and his surroundings swam into focus.

He realized that he was in a spaceship. The cabin was a shambles. Boxes and equipment drifted around him, evidently ripped loose from their moorings by some sudden strain. Burnt-out wires ran across the floor. A row of lockers along one wall had been fused into slag.

He stared, but no recognition came. As far as he knew, he was seeing this for the first time.

He raised a hand and pushed against the ceiling, drifted down, pushed again, and managed to grasp a wall rail. Holding this tightly, he tried to think.

"There is a logical explanation for all this," he said aloud, just to hear his own voice. "All I have to do is remember." Remember . . .

What was his name? He didn't know.

"Hullo!" he shouted. "Is there anyone here?" His words echoed between the ship's narrow walls. There was no answer. He propelled himself across the cabin, ducking to miss the floating boxes.

After half an hour he knew he was the only person aboard the ship.

He pushed himself back to the front of the ship. There was a padded chair there, with a long panel in front of it. He strapped himself into the chair and studied the panel.

It consisted of two blank screens, one much larger than the other. Under the large screen were two buttons, marked *vision-*

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*front*, and *vision-rear*. A dial beneath the buttons was calibrated for focus. The small screen was unmarked.

Not finding any other controls, he pushed the *vision-front* button. The screen cleared, showing black space with the brilliant points of the stars before him. He stared at it for a long time, open-mouthed, then turned away.

The first thing to do, he told himself, was to assemble all the knowledge at his disposal and see what he could deduce from it.

"I am a man," he said. "I am in a spaceship, in space. I know what stars are, what planets are. Let me see—" He had a rudimentary knowledge of astronomy, less of physics and chemistry. He remembered some English literature, although he couldn't think of any writers except Traudzel, a popular novelist. He remembered the authors of several history books, but couldn't place their contents.

He knew the name for what he had: amnesia.

Suddenly he had a great desire to see himself, to look at his own face. Surely recognition and memory would follow. He shoved himself across the room again, and started searching for a mirror.

There were lockers built into the walls, and he opened them hastily, spilling the contents into the weightless air. In the third locker he found a shaving-kit and a small steel mirror. He studied the reflection anxiously. A long irregular face, drained of colour. Dark stubble growing on the chin. Bloodless lips.

The face of a stranger.

He fought down fresh panic and searched the cabin, looking for some clue to his identity. Quickly he pawed through the floating boxes, shoving them aside when they proved to contain nothing but food or water. He looked on.

Floating in one corner of the cabin was a sheet of scorched paper. He seized it.

*Dear Ran* (it began), *The biochem boys have been doing some hurry-hurry last-minute checking on the pento. Seems there's a strong chance it might induce amnesia. Something about the strength of the drug, plus the near-traumatic experience you're undergoing, whether you're aware of it or not. Now they tell us! Anyhow, I'm dashing off this note at zero-minus-fourteen minutes, just as a refresher for you in case they're right.*

*First, don't look for any controls. Everything's automatic, or it should be if this pile of cardboard and glue holds together. (Don't blame the technicians; they had practically no time to get it finished and away before flash-moment.)*

*Your course is set for automatic planetary selection, so just sit tight. I don't suppose you could forget Marselli's theorem, but if you have, don't worry about landing among eighteen-headed*

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*intelligent centipedes. You'll reach humanoid life because it has to be humanoid life.*

*You may be a bit battered after blast-off, but the pento will pull you through. If the cabin is messy, it's because we just didn't have time to check everything for stress-strain tolerances.*

*Now for the mission. Go at once to Projector One in Locker Fifteen. The projector is set for self-destruction after one viewing, so make sure you understand it. The mission is of ultimate importance, Doctor, and every man and woman on Earth is with you. Don't let us down.*

Someone named Fred Andersen had signed it.

Ran started looking for Locker Fifteen. He found at once where it had been. Lockers Eleven to Twenty-five were fused and melted. Their contents were destroyed.

That was that. Only the scorched paper linked him now with his past, his friends, all Earth. Even though his memory was gone, it was a relief to know that the amnesia had an explanation.

But what did it mean? Why had they thrown the ship together in such a rush? Why had they placed him in it—alone—and sent him out? And this all-important mission—if it was so vital, why hadn't they safeguarded it better?

The note raised more questions than it answered. Frowning, Ran pushed himself back to the panel. He looked at the screen again, at the spectacle of the stars, trying to reason it out.

Perhaps there was a disease. He was the only person not infected. They had built the ship and shot him out to space. The mission? To contact another planet, find an antidote, and bring it back . . . Ridiculous.

He looked over the panel again, and pushed the button for *vision-rear*. And almost fainted.

A glaring, blinding light filled the entire screen, scorching his eyes. Hastily he cut down the field of focus until he was able to make out what it was. A nova. And the letter had mentioned the flash-moment.

Ran knew that Sol was the nova. And that Earth was consumed.

There was no clock on the ship, so Dr. Ran had no idea how long he had been travelling. For a long time he just drifted around, dazed, constantly coming back to the screen.

The nova dwindled as the ship speeded on.

Ran ate and slept. He wandered round the ship, examining, searching. The floating boxes were in the way, so he started to pull them down and secure them.

Days might have passed, or weeks.

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After a while, Ran started to put the facts he knew into a coherent structure. There were gaps and questions in it, probably untruths as well, but it was a beginning.

He had been chosen to go in the spaceship. Not as a pilot, since the ship was automatic, but for some other reason. The letter had called him " Doctor."

Doctor of what? He didn't know.

The makers of the ship had known Sol was going nova. They couldn't, evidently, rescue any sizeable portion of Earth's population. Instead, they had sacrificed themselves and everyone else to make sure of rescuing him.

Why him?

He was expected to do a job of the greatest importance. So important that everyone had been subordinated to it. So important that the destruction of Earth itself seemed secondary, as long as the mission was accomplished.

What could that mission be? Dr. Ran couldn't conceive of anything so important. But he had no other theory that came anywhere near fitting the facts as he knew them.

He tried to attack the problem from another viewpoint. What would he do, he asked himself, if he knew that Sol was going nova in a short time, and he could rescue only a limited number of people with a certainty of success?

He would have sent out couples, at least one couple, in an attempt to perpetuate human stock. But apparently the leaders of Earth hadn't seen it that way.

After a time, the small screen flashed into life. It read: *Planet. Contact 100 hours.* He sat in front of the panel and watched. After a long time the digits changed. *Contact 99 hours.* He had plenty of time. He ate, and went back to work, getting the ship into what order he could.

While he was storing boxes in the remaining lockers, he found a carefully packed and fastened machine. He recognized it at once as a projector. On its side was engraved a large 2. A spare, he thought, his heart pounding violently. Why hadn't he thought of that? He looked into the viewer and pushed the button.

The film took over an hour. It started with a poetic survey of Earth; flashes of her cities, fields, forests, rivers, oceans. Her people, her animals, all in brief vignettes. There was no soundtrack.

The camera moved to an observatory, explaining its purpose visually. It showed the discovery of the Sun's instability, the faces of the astrophysicists who discovered it.

Then the race against time began, and the rapid growth of the ship. He saw himself running up to it, grinning at the

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camera, shaking someone's hand, and disappearing inside. The film stopped there. They must have stored the camera, given him the injection, and sent him off.

Another reel started.

"Hullo, Ran," a voice said. The picture showed a large, calm man in a business suit. He looked directly at Ran out of the screen.

"I couldn't resist this opportunity to speak to you again, Dr. Ellis. You're deep in space now, and you've undoubtedly seen the nova that has consumed Earth. You're lonely, I dare say. Don't be, Ran. As representative of Earth's peoples, I'm taking this final chance to wish you luck in your great mission. I don't have to tell you that we're all with you. Don't feel alone.

"You have, of course, seen the film in Projector One, and have a thorough understanding of your mission. This portion of film—with my face and voice on it—will be automatically destroyed in the same way. Naturally, we can't let extra-terrestrials in on our little secret yet.

"They'll find out soon enough. You can feel free to explain anything on the remainder of this film to them. It should win you plenty of sympathy. Make no reference, of course, to the great discovery or the techniques that stemmed from it. If they want the faster-than-light drive, tell them the truth—that you don't know how it's propagated, since it was developed only a year or so before Sol went nova. Tell them that any tampering with the ship will cause the engines to dissolve. Good luck, Doctor. And good hunting."

The face faded and the machine hummed louder, destroying the last reel.

He put the projector carefully back in its case, tied it into the locker, and went back to the control panel. The screen read: *Contact 97 hours.*

He sat down and tried to place the new facts into his structure. As background, he remembered vaguely the great peaceful civilization of Earth. They had been almost ready to go out for the stars when the Sun's instability was found. The faster-than-light drive had been developed too late.

Against that background he had been selected to man the escape ship. He alone, for some unfathomable reason. The job given him was thought more important, evidently, than any attempts at race-survival.

He was to make contact with intelligent life, and tell them about Earth. But he was to withhold any mention of the greatest discovery and its resulting techniques. Whatever they were.

And then he was to perform his mission.

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He felt as though he would burst. He couldn't remember. *Why* hadn't the fools engraved his instructions on bronze? *What could it be?*

The screen read: *Contact 96 hours.*

Dr. Ran Ellis strapped himself into the pilot chair and cried from sheer frustration.

The great ship looked, probed, and reported. The small screen flashed into life. *Atmosphere—chlorine. Life—non-existent.* The data was fed to the ship's selectors. Circuits closed, other circuits opened. A new course was set up, and the ship speeded on.

Dr. Ellis ate and slept and thought. Another planet was reported, examined, and rejected.

Dr. Ellis continued thinking, and made one unimportant discovery. He had a photographic memory. He discovered this by thinking back over the film. He could remember every detail of the hour-long spectacle, every face, every movement.

He tested himself as the ship went on, and found that the ability was a constant. It worried him for a while, until he realized that it was probably a factor in his selection. A photographic memory would be quite an asset in learning a new language. Quite ironic, he thought. Perfect retention—but no memories.

A third planet was rejected.

Ellis outlined the possibilities he could think of, in an effort to discover the nature of his mission. To erect a shrine to Earth? Possibly. But why the urgency, then, the stressed importance?

Perhaps he was sent out as a teacher. Earth's last gesture, to instruct some inhabited planet in the ways of peace and co-operation. Why send a doctor on a job like that? Besides, it was illogical. People learn over millennia, not in a few years. And it just didn't fit the *mood* of the two messages. Both the man in the film and the note-writer had seemed practical men. It was impossible to think of either of them as altruists.

A fourth planet came into range, was checked, and left behind.

And what, he wondered, was the "great discovery?" If not the faster-than-light drive, what could it be? More than likely a philosophical discovery. The way man could live in peace, or something like that. Then why wasn't he supposed to mention it?

A screen flashed, showing the oxygen content of the fifth planet. Ellis ignored it, then looked up as generators deep in the body of the ship hummed into life.

*Prepare for landing*, the screen told him.

His heart leapt convulsively, and Ellis had a momentary

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difficulty in breathing. This was it. A terror filled him as gravitation tugged at the ship. He fought it, but the terror increased. He screamed and tore at his straps as the ship started to go perceptibly down.

On the big screen was the blue and green of an oxygen planet.

Then Ellis remembered something. "The emergence from deep space into a planetary system is analogous to the emergent birth-trauma." A common reaction, he told himself, but an easily controllable one for a psychiatrist—

A psychiatrist! Dr. Randolph Ellis, psychiatrist.

He knew what kind of doctor he was. He searched his mind for more information, fruitlessly. That was as far as it went. Why had Earth sent a psychiatrist into space?

He blacked out as the ship screamed into the atmosphere.

Ellis recovered almost at once as the ship landed itself. Unstrapping, he switched on the vision-ports. There were vehicles coming towards the ship, filled with people. Human-seeming people.

He had to make a decision now, one that would affect the rest of his time on this planet. What was he going to do? What would his course of action be?

Ellis thought for a moment, then decided he would have to play by ear. He would extemporize. No communication would be possible until he had learnt the language. After that, he would say that he was sent from Earth to—to—

What? He would decide when the time came. Glancing at the screens, he saw that the atmosphere was breathable. The side of the ship swung open, and Ellis walked out.

He had landed on a subcontinent called Kreld, and the inhabitants were Kreldans. Politically, the planet had reached the world-government stage, but so recently that the inhabitants could still be classified into the older political divisions.

With his photographic memory Ellis found no difficulty in learning the Kreldan language, once a common basis had been established for key words. The people, of the common root Man, seemed no more foreign than some members of his own race. Ellis knew that this eventuality had been predicted. The ship would have rejected any other. The more he thought of it, the more he was certain that the mission depended on this similarity.

Ellis learnt and observed and thought. He was due, as soon as he had mastered their tongue sufficiently, to meet the ruling council. This was a meeting he dreaded, and put off as long as he could. Nevertheless, the time came.

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He was ushered through the halls of the Council Building, to the door of the Main Council Room. He walked in with the projector under his arm

"You are most welcome, sir," the leader of the council said. Ellis returned the salutation and presented his films. There was no discussion until everyone had seen them.

"Then you are the last representative of your race?" the council leader asked. Ellis nodded, looking at the kindly, seamed old face.

"Why did your people send only you?" another council member asked. "Why weren't a man and woman sent?" The same question, Ellis thought, that I've been asking myself.

"It would be impossible," he told them, "for me to explain the psychology of my race in a few words. Our decision was contained in our very sense of being." A meaningless lie, he thought to himself, but what else could he say?

"You will have to explain the psychology of your race some time," the man said.

Ellis nodded, looking over the faces of the council. He was able to estimate the effect the beautifully prepared film had had on them; they were going to be pleasant to this last representative of a great race.

"We are very interested in your faster-than-light drive," another council member said. "Could you help us attain that?"

"I'm afraid not," Ellis said. From what he had learnt, he knew that their technology was pre-atomic, several centuries behind Earth's. "I am not a scientist. I have no knowledge of the drive. It was a late development."

"We could examine it ourselves," a man said.

"I don't think that would be wise," Ellis told him. "My people consider it inadvisable to give a planet technological products beyond their present level of attainment." So much for theory. "The engines will overload if tampered with."

"You say you are not a scientist," the old leader said pleasantly, changing the subject. "If I may ask, what are you?"

"A psychiatrist," Ellis said.

They talked for hours. Ellis dodged and faked and invented, trying to fill in gaps in his knowledge. The council wanted to know about all phases of life on Earth, all the details of technological and social advances. They wondered about Earth's method of prior nova-detection. And why had he decided to come here? And finally, in view of his coming alone, was his race suicidally inclined?

"We shall wish to ask you more in the future," the old council leader said, ending the session.

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"I shall be happy to answer anything in my power," Ellis said.

"That doesn't seem to be much," a member said.

"Now, Elgg—remember the shock this man has undergone," the council leader said. "His entire race has been destroyed. I do not believe we are being hospitable." He turned to Ellis. "Sir, you have helped us immeasurably as it is. For example, now that we know the possibility of controlled atomic power, we can direct research towards that goal. Of course, you will be reimbursed by the state. What would you like to do?"

Ellis hesitated, wondering what he should say.

"Would you like to head a museum project for Earth? A monument to your great people?"

Was that his mission, Ellis wondered? He shook his head. "I am a doctor, sir. A psychiatrist. Perhaps I could help in that respect."

"But you don't know our people," the old leader said concernedly. "It would take you a lifetime to learn the nature of our tensions and problems. To learn them in sufficient intimacy to enable you to practise."

"True," Ellis said. "But our races *are* alike. Our civilizations have taken like courses. Since I represent a more advanced psychological tradition, my methods might be of help to your doctors— "

"Of course, Dr. Ellis. I must not make the mistake of underestimating a species that has crossed the stars." The old leader smiled ruefully. "I myself will introduce you to the head of one of our hospitals." He stood up. "If you will come with me."

Ellis followed, with his heart pounding. His mission must have something to do with psychiatry. Why else send a psychiatrist? But he still didn't know what he was supposed to do. And, to make it worse, he could remember practically none of his psychiatric background.

"I think that takes care of all the testing-apparatus," the doctor said, looking at Ellis from behind steel-rimmed glasses. He was young, moon-faced, and eager to learn from the older civilization of Earth. "Can you suggest any improvements?" he asked.

"I'll have to look over the set-up more closely," Ellis said, following the doctor down a long, pale blue corridor. The testing-apparatus had struck a complete blank.

"I don't have to tell you how eager I am for this opportunity," the doctor said. "I have no doubt that you Terrans were able to discover many of the secrets of the mind."

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"Oh yes," Ellis said.

"Down this way we have the wards," the doctor said. "Would you care to see them?"

"Fine." Ellis followed the doctor, biting his lip angrily. His memory was still gone. He had no more psychiatric knowledge than a poorly informed layman. Unless something happened soon, he would be forced to admit his amnesia.

"In this room," the doctor said, "we have several quiet cases." Ellis followed him in, and looked at the dull, lifeless faces of three patients.

"Catatonic," the doctor said, pointing to the first man. "I don't suppose you have a cure for that?" He smiled good-naturedly.

Ellis didn't answer. Another memory had popped into his mind. It was just a few lines of conversation . . .

"*But is it ethical?*" *he had asked. In a room like this, on Earth.*

"*Of course,*" *someone had answered.* "*We won't tamper with the normals. But the idiots, the criminally insane—the psychotics who could never use their minds anyhow—it isn't as though we were robbing them of anything. It's a mercy, really . . .*"

Just that much. He didn't know to whom he had been talking. Another doctor, probably. They had been discussing some new method of dealing with defectives. A new cure? It seemed possible. A drastic one, from the content.

"Have you found a cure for it?" the moon-faced doctor asked again.

"Yes. Yes, we have," Ellis said, taking his courage in both hands.

The doctor stepped back and stared. "But you couldn't! You can't repair a brain where there's organic damage—deterioration, or lack of development—" He checked himself. "But listen to *me*, telling *you*. Go ahead, Doctor."

Ellis looked at the man in the first bed. "Get me some assistants, Doctor." The doctor hesitated, then hurried out of the room.

Ellis bent over the catatonic and looked at his face. He wasn't sure of what he was doing, but he reached out and touched the man's forehead with his finger.

Something in Ellis's mind clicked.

The catatonic collapsed.

Ellis waited, but nothing seemed to be happening. He walked over to the second patient and repeated the operation. That one collapsed also, and the one after him.

The doctor came back, with two wide-eyed helpers. "What's happening here?" he asked. "What have you done?"

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"I don't know if our methods will work on your people," Ellis bluffed. "Please leave me alone—completely alone for a little while. The concentration necessary . . ." He turned back to the patients.

The doctor started to say something, changed his mind, and left quietly, taking the assistants with him.

Sweating, Ellis examined the pulse of the first man. It was still beating.

He straightened and started to pace the room.

He had a power of some sort. He could knock a psychotic flat on his back. Fine. Nerves—connections. He wished he could remember how many nerve connections there were in the human brain. Some fantastic number; ten to the twenty-fifth to the tenth? No, that didn't seem right. But a fantastic number. What did it matter? It mattered, he was certain.

The first man groaned and sat up. Ellis walked over to him. The man felt his head, and groaned again.

His own personal shock-therapy, Ellis thought. Perhaps Earth had discovered the answer to insanity. As a last gift to the universe, they had sent him out to heal—

"How do you feel?" he asked the patient.

"Not bad," the man answered—in English!

"What did you say?" Ellis gasped.

He wondered if there had been a thought-transfer of some sort. Had he given the man his own grasp of English? Let's see, if you reshunted the load from the damaged nerves to unused ones . . .

"I feel fine, Ellis. Good work. We weren't sure if that haywire and cardboard ship would hold together, but as I told you, it was the best we could do under the—"

"*Who are you?*"

The man climbed out of bed and looked around. "Are the natives gone?"

"Yes."

"I'm Haines, Representative of Earth. What's the matter with you, Ellis?"

The other men were reviving now.

"And they—?"

"Dr. Clitell."

"Fred Andersen."

The man who called himself Haines looked over his body carefully.

"You might have found a better host for me, Ellis. For old time's sake. But no matter. What's wrong, man?"

Ellis explained about his amnesia.

"Didn't you get the note?"

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Ellis told them everything.

"We'll get your memory back, don't worry," Haines said "It feels good to have a body again. Hold it."

The door opened and the young doctor peered in. He saw the patients and let out a shout.

"You did it! You are able—"

"Please, Doctor!" Ellis snapped. "No sudden noises. I must ask not to be disturbed for at least another hour."

"Of course," the doctor said respectfully, withdrew his face, and closed the door.

"How was it possible?" Ellis asked, looking at the three men. "I don't understand— "

"The great discovery," Haines said. "Surely you remember that? You worked on it. No? Explain, Andersen."

The third man walked over slowly. Ellis noticed that the vacuous faces were beginning to tighten already, shaped by the minds in control of them.

"Don't you remember, Ellis, the research on personality factors?"

Ellis shook his head.

"You were looking for the lowest common denominator of human life-and-personality. The source, if you wish. The research actually started almost a hundred years ago, after Orgell found that personality was independent of body, although influenced and modified by it. Remember now?"

"No. Go on."

"To keep it simple, you—and about thirty others—found that the lowest indivisible unit of personality was an independent non-material substance. You named it the M molecule. It is a complex mental pattern."

"Mental?"

"Well, non-material," Andersen said. "It can be transferred from host to host."

"Sounds like possession," Ellis said.

Andersen, noticing a mirror in a corner of the room, walked over to examine his new face. He shuddered when he saw it, and wiped saliva from its lips.

"The old myths of spirit-possession aren't so far off," Dr. Clitell said.

He was the only one wearing his body with any sort of ease. "Some people have always been able to separate their minds from their bodies. Astral projection, and that sort of thing. It wasn't until recently that the personality was localized and an invariant separation-resynthesis procedure adopted."

"Does that mean you're immortal?" Ellis asked.

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"Oh no!" Andersen said, walking over. He grimaced, trying to check his host's unconscious drool. "The personality has a definite life-span. It's somewhat longer than the body's, of course, but still definitely within limits." He succeeded in stopping the flow. "However, it can be stored dormant almost indefinitely."

"And what better place," Haines put in, "for storing a non-material molecule than your own mind? Your nerve connections have been harbouring us all along, Ellis. There's plenty of room there. The number of connections in a human brain have been calculated at ten to the—"

"I remember that part," Ellis said. "I'm beginning to understand." He knew why he had been chosen. A psychiatrist would be needed for this job, to gain admittance to the hosts. He had been specially trained. Of course the Kreldans couldn't be told yet about the mission or the M molecule. They wouldn't take kindly to their people—even the defectives—being possessed by Earthmen.

"Look at this," Haines said. Fascinated, he was bending his fingers backwards. He had discovered that his host was double-jointed.

The other two men were trying out their bodies in the manner of a man testing a horse. They flexed their arms, bunched their muscles, practised walking.

"But," Ellis asked, "how will the race . . . I mean, how about women?"

"Get more hosts," Haines told him, still trying out his fingers. "Male and female. You're going to be the greatest doctor on this planet. Every defective will be brought to you for cure. Of course, we're all in on the secret. No one's going to spill before the right time."

He paused and grinned.

"Ellis—do you realize what this means? Earth isn't dead! She'll live again."

Ellis nodded. He was having difficulty identifying the large, bland Haines in the film with the shrill-voiced scarecrow in front of him. It would take time for all of them, he knew, and a good deal of readjustment.

"We'd better get to work," Andersen said. "After you have the defectives on this planet serviced, we'll refuel your ship and send you on."

"Where?" Ellis asked. "To another planet?"

"Of course. There are probably only a few million hosts on this one, since we're not touching normals."

"Only! But how many people have I stored?"

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There was the sound of voices in the hall.

"You really are a case," Haines said, amused. "Back into bed, men—I think I hear that doctor. How many? The population of Earth was about four billion. You have all of them."

★ ★ ★

## *IMPERIAL PREFERENCE*

. . . We had much looked forward to seeing *Ball of Fire*, with Gary Cooper and that Miss Stanwyck. It was coming to the Empire and the trailer was jolly sexy. But it so happened that during the beginning of the week we were out on some long manœuvres and an air raid took place on Southampton which sounded and appeared to have caused a great deal of damage. With I fear but one thought in my head I dashed ashore as soon as we tied up and asked the first civilian I saw the question which had been worrying me.

"Is the Empire saved?"

"Well, we've taken Tobruk again and are advancing," said the man with great pride. I did not have the heart to tell him that I was thinking of Miss Stanwyck's strip-tease and likelihood of seeing same. I thanked him for his joyous information and went straight into the Empire, which had been saved too.

PETER BULL, *To Sea in a Sieve*

## *SUMMER PIE*

**Put in your thumb and see how many plums you can pull out. There should be 15 and the answers, if you can't get them, are given on page 116.**

1. *Everybody loves a lord, but can you place in their right order of rank: Earl, Baron, Duke, Viscount, Marquis.*
2. *How did the jeep get its name?*
3. *Do you know the meanings of these phrases:*
   - *a. fortified wine*
   - *b. dog's nose*
   - *c. to drink supernaculum*
4. *Three of the kings in a pack of cards hold swords, one holds a battle-axe. Which holds the axe?*
5. *Which was the earliest postage stamp used?*
6. *What is the greatest number of "fouettés en tournant," or spins, called for in classical ballet? In which ballet does it occur?*
7. *What is: Yggdrasil, ylang-ylang?*

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★ *Take a lonely American sailor and a pretty young Neapolitan grass widow. Take the sunshine of Italy and the sparkle of France. And here's the result - the newest, most enchanting love story by French prize-winning author Félicien Marceau, to bring you all the tangy freshness of a holiday in the South. See Naples and Live!*

# CONCETTINA'S ROSES

## BY FELICIEN MARCEAU

BEING a modest girl, Concettina Cutolo set little store by her body. That is to say, when men wanted her, she mostly gave herself to them without any fuss and without imagining as so many women do that that was anything to make a song and dance about. And, in its way, this showed sound judgment, for Concettina was no Venus de Milo.

Her neck was too short and she was too small. Her nose, which she herself liked to call retroussé, was small and squat, with an engaging upward tilt. However, at twenty-two, she had a certain freshness and glow about her, she was pleasantly curved, and her eyes were beautiful. When she walked down the street in her cotton dress, men quite often turned to stare after her, and some even went so far as to give appreciative whistles. In fact, in her own rather common way, she wasn't bad-looking.

Her father was dead, and her mother had been reduced to street peddling—water-melon in summer, cooked tripe in winter. Concettina had had to earn her own living since she was fifteen, and she had held many different jobs. She had been a nursemaid —but had you seen her playing with her charges on the nearby common, she would have seemed more of a child than they. She had worked as housemaid, salesgirl in a large store, and even, one glorious, unforgettable time, as an extra in a novel-told-in-photographs.

All these, as you know, are careers where one meets with many an advance. Concettina would sometimes yield, sometimes refuse, depending on her mood, on pressure of circumstance, or

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according to the person concerned—but there was never any clear-cut principle about it.

At nineteen, after a brief affair, a certain Sandro, a mason by trade, had married her—no one knows why for, six months later, under pretext of a job at Viterbo, he had disappeared without trace. Concettina was only mildly distressed. At that time the war in Italy entered its most violent phase. Air raids, nights passed in shelters, hardship of all kinds. When the premises were damaged by a bomb, Concettina's latest employer, a milliner, shut up shop. For several months, Concettina had gone hungry, and when the Americans occupied Naples, Concettina, like many others, hung about them, in search of something to eat.

In the narrow squares, between the peeling façades of shabby palazzi and the church fronts embossed with angel trumpeters, jitterbug sessions were arranged. The GIs distributed tinned food and cartons of cigarettes—the gold standard of the new economy. Sometimes, when one of the soldiers was insistent, Concettina would take him home to the great, gloomy ground-floor room where she lived with her mother. The soldier would deposit the tins of food on the table. Concettina's mother, with a sigh, would take herself off either to wander up and down the street or to call on a neighbour.

When she returned, they would sit down to a meal. Usually the soldier would stay on, too, sometimes sitting in silence, sometimes passing round snapshots of his mother or his kids. Those who have never been hungry may pass judgment. For my part, I've known what it's like to be hungry.

Then, one day, going along the via Caracciolo, the beautiful avenue that skirts the sea, Concettina caught sight of a sailor sitting on the parapet. Till then Concettina had known soldiers only. She liked the look of this sailor. With his sad face and his white porkpie cap, he looked like a lost child. As she passed by, Concettina smiled at him. He looked startled.

Concettina slowed down.

Legs dangling, hands—great pathetic paws—propped on the parapet, shoulders hunched, the sailor gazed after her. Concettina had on her black cotton dress patterned with yellow flowers, and the strong breeze from the sea was blowing her hair about her face. It gave her an untamed look that was most becoming. On the other side of the parapet, a rowing-boat was drawing slowly in to shore. Steering a parallel course, Concettina approached the parapet and leaned on it, watching.

Humping along the wall on his behind, the sailor drew up beside her. "Walk?" he said

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"All right," said Concettina. But she spoke in a reserved, almost abstracted way, and continued to stare at the sea, which was rather choppy that day. White horses were curvetting along its surface, and the little boats, like goats angry at being tied up, kept butting the sea. Some way out, the deck of an aircraft carrier, like a factory yard.

"Walk with me?" the sailor asked.

At last Concettina raised her eyes. The sailor was bending over her. He, too, had a turned-up nose—clumsily turned up as if it had been done with the back of the hand—and wide round nostrils. And freckles.

"With me?" he asked again, in English, and so that there might be no misunderstanding, he pointed at himself. Concettina gave that shrug of the shoulders that is the Italian for yes. The sailor jumped off the wall. Concettina had a great disappointment: he was very short. However, as the saying goes, you don't look a tinned gift-horse in the mouth.

Concettina turned round and leaned back against the parapet.

And so, standing there, in the sunlight, with the sea behind them, one nervous and the other smiling, they looked exactly what they were: a sailor and a girl. In front of them, the broad avenue, with its big hotels—at least two of them badly bomb-riddled—while to and fro went the horse carriages, clop clop clop, and the jeeps, and the shoeshine boys, about twelve years old, wearing jackets that were too long for them, and beating on their boxes with their brushes. And the deep blue sky above, and the wind blowing in sharp squalls like great sails bellying.

They started walking. On their way they came to a tea-room, and the sailor suggested they should go in. It was one of the smartest tea-rooms in Naples, which, on her own, Concettina would never have dared to enter. But, then, to Americans nothing is sacred.

At the table, the sailor took Concettina's hand in his, and while he stroked it gently, nervously, he told her his name was Johnny. Sitting there beside him, with her fork speared into a pink-and-green gâteau, Concettina felt the strangest sensation sweep over her: a sort of self-respect. She was relieved when the sailor, instead of asking to go home with her, suggested they should meet again the next day.

The next day, as Concettina reached the via Caracciolo, she saw him from a distance, already there, waiting, sitting as he had sat the day before, on the parapet. To the left of him, a canvas bag. To the right, a bunch of roses.

The canvas bag was only to be expected: no doubt it contained the tins of food. But the roses?

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Stopping short on the other side of the avenue, some thirty yards away from the sailor, against the background of pale blue sky and dark blue sea, cut off from him by the stream of jeeps from which soldiers called out to her admiringly, Concettina suddenly felt apprehensive, hesitant.

*Roses?* No one had ever given her roses, though she'd served in a florist's and customers had quite often tried to make a date with her. But none of them, after ordering his bouquet, had ever dreamt of taking out even one rose for her. So why had he brought these roses now?

She would have liked to run away. Those roses frightened her. Those roses had a treacherous look. What on earth could this American want?

He looked guileless enough, however, there on his bit of wall. He hadn't thought of looking across to the other side of the avenue; he was keeping watch to the left, and a worried look was already coming over his face, so defenceless and bare under the white porkpie cap. Concettina made up her mind. She crossed over. If it was some joke, she would find out. But her heart was beating fast.

It wasn't a joke. Or rather, not straight away. The sailor held out the roses and then, as if apologizing for lord knows what, the bag.

"Eat," he said with explanatory gestures.

He had grown bolder since the day before. He took Concettina's chin in his hand, raised it, and examined her face with all the care of a doctor.

"You not eat good. Now eat all that."

This time Concettina took him home with her. Her mother was busy fanning a wood fire, thoughtfully—or at least so it seemed. Seeing the American with Concettina, she made as if to leave, but the sailor was having none of that. "You not go," he said. "Me visitor." Then, as if to make up for an oversight, with an apologetic glance towards Concettina, he took back the roses and presented them to Signora Cutolo. She, too, seemed perplexed.

"Put them in a vase," said Concettina. "That'll please him."

Signora Cutolo let out a few incoherent mumbles of bewilderment, and went to rummage about in the back of the room. At last she found a vase, into which she dumped the whole bunch of flowers at one go. Then she came back and deposited it, not in the centre of the table, but in front of the American.

"Fine!" he said, and added a few finishing touches to the floral arrangement.

Dumbfounded Signora Cutolo remained standing by the

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table. The American made her sit down. Concettina gave up trying to understand; it was simpler simply to do what she wanted to do, so she took out some plates and laid the table. Eagerly, Johnny opened the tins and proudly exhibited their contents. They started to eat.

Appropriate sign-language was exchanged, between Concettina and the sailor to show, respectively, that she found the tinned food delicious and that he was delighted; between the sailor and Signora Cutolo to urge her to take some more and to make it understood that, no thank you, she was brim-full. From time to time Signora Cutolo cast a thoughtful glance at the roses. She had a large fleshy face, not without dignity.

The meal over, the American laughed out loud, then, suddenly blushing, he rose to his feet and launched into an unending, gesticulating rigmarole, from which, hardly believing their ears, Concettina and her mother finally gathered that he was asking Signora Cutolo's permission to take her daughter to the cinema.

*Permission?* Concettina shrugged. Signora Cutolo threw another distraught look towards the roses. To go to the cinema? At all events, Signora Cutolo said yes.

The sailor laughed delightedly and, bending over, gave her a kiss. Signora Cutolo was completely stunned and no longer knew where she was. Some dim memory from childhood days stirred in her, and with her fat little thumb, she gently made the sign of the cross on the sailor's forehead.

The next day it was the same, and the day after, and for a whole week after that. Johnny now came straight to the house, always loaded with tins, cigarettes, and other oddments not always of immediate use to a woman but good enough for Concettina to barter with. And every second day, without fail, Johnny brought flowers—two bunches, one for Concettina, the other for Signora Cutolo. Dinner over, he would rise and, with due formality, ask permission to take Concettina out.

They went to the cinema, or they would take a stroll as far as Santa Lucia. Sitting out on the thresholds of their *bassi* in the mild and balmy evening air, gay old husbands and their fat wives followed the young couple, sometimes with mocking glances, sometimes with a shrewd look. Or a group of street urchins would trail behind, with impudent and explicit gestures. Most of the time Johnny seemed to take no notice, but once he seized one of the offenders and boxed his ears—this retaliation met with general disapproval.

In Italian he made rapid progress. For the rest . . . well, for the rest, there was no progress at all. Leaning on the parapet,

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with Concettina beside him, he would stare out at the sea, the immense sweep of the bay, the sunset, the lilac-coloured mass of Capri rising out of the darkening water. The view that has inspired the dreams of so many honeymooners, so many other, less innocent lovers, failed to stir him into more lively action.

From a restaurant farther down, a singer, head thrown back and body swaying, as if drunk on his own trills, was flinging his ecstatic serenade into the sky. Johnny remained unmoved. A nice boy, obliging, affectionate. But phlegmatic.

It took nine days for Concettina to emerge from the stupor—a very pleasant one, anyway—in which the American's behaviour left her. As the ritual visit drew near, she sent her mother away, put on her new blouse—which had cost her six packets of cigarettes—drenched herself with scent—eight packets—and waited.

Johnny arrived, asked after Signora Cutolo, and seemed sorry she wasn't in. It was one of the flower days, and he had brought his two bunches—roses, to be precise. Carefully he took the bunches from the day before yesterday, and threw them out in the street—they aren't fussy in Naples: if you have something that's in your way, throw it out into the street—then came back and started to arrange the new ones.

"Kiss me!" said Concettina, at the end of her patience.

Johnny made as if to kiss her on the cheek. But Concettina turned her head and their lips met.

Victory! Johnny didn't draw back. It was a long, serious, absorbing kiss, and when he drew back, there was a changed expression on Johnny's face. "You—you love me?" he exclaimed.

"Idiot," said Concettina lightly.

Here at last was the language she was used to, the situation she knew so well. With renewed confidence, she went over and stretched out on the bed—a large one with brass balls on the bedstead—where she and her mother slept at night. She patted the bedclothes, inviting Johnny to join her. He sat down on the edge of the bed.

Concettina began to unbutton her blouse. It was poorly sewn—it's always like that with mass-produced stuff—and a button sprang off. Concettina turned away and put it carefully on the bedside table. At that moment, she caught sight of Johnny at her shoulder, consternation and dismay on his face.

"No! no!" he said. "First we get married."

"Oh yes," said Concettina, busy with her skirt fastener.

But Johnny, too, had placed his hand on the fastener.

"Don't be so impatient," she said amiably.

"No," he repeated "First, marry."

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Dumbstruck, Concettina half rose. In a return of modesty, she crossed her hands over her breast. "You want to—marry me?" She looked at him, stupefied.

"Yes." He took out his wallet. "I've already got the papers."

Concettina hastily buttoned her blouse and did up her skirt.

"You don't want to marry me?" Johnny asked apprehensively.

*Not want to?* For a poor Neapolitan girl, lost in a chaotic aftermath of war, marrying an American—that was Eldorado, that was like winning the Irish sweepstake, or being made Prime Minister. For an instant, Concettina was dazzled. Then, faced with Johnny, and the two bunches of roses on the table, she found herself overwhelmed with tenderness—and a great need to be honest.

"We don't have to, you know," she said.

Johnny looked shocked. "Oh yes, we do," he said. "With all the papers in order."

Concettina would have liked to let the marvellous dream go on a little longer. She took his hand, stroked it. Then, with a shrug, she said, "I'm already married . . ."

The sailor got up abruptly, gripped the brass bedstead. "You're married?"

"Yes."

He smiled, looked all round, and then, moving on tiptoe as if dancing, he circled the room. In passing, with a casual gesture, he opened the wardrobe and pantry doors ajar and looked inside, peered under the tablecloth. Each time, he turned towards Concettina and spread out his hands as if to say he couldn't find anything. At last he put his thoughts into words. "See? No husband."

"He went away."

One hand on his hip, the other pushing his porkpie up off the nape of his neck, Johnny considered the situation. "Prisoner of war?"

"No, he just left. He deserted me."

"Well, then, you divorce him."

"It's not possible here, divorce."

Johnny gave a wide, unbelieving smile. Tell that to the Marines! And Concettina had a moment of doubt, of hope. She had been told that divorce was forbidden in Italy, but with a war on . . . and all these upheavals . . . and if it were for the sake of an American . . . perhaps . . .?

"All right," she said.

"You do want to marry me?"

"Yes."

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"Good!" said Johnny emphatically. "Very good. Tomorrow I have to leave. My ship's going to Casablanca for a month. While I'm away, you'll arrange about the divorce, and when I come back we'll get married."

He went over to her, took her by the shoulders, and kissed her solemnly on the lips. Concettina sank back on the bed, but Johnny was already on his way out. He gave a reassuring wave of the hand and left, first straightening his cap.

Some minutes later, he came back, bringing three bottles of wine, and Signora Cutolo whom he had met wandering the street like a lost soul. It was a quiet but cordial engagement party. They were all three happy. On leaving, Johnny kissed Concettina on the mouth—he was already doing this in a calm, conjugal way—and then he went, leaving behind him twenty dollars for the divorce expenses and two abysmally perplexed women.

Signora Cutolo was the first to recover. "We must consult Don Gennaro," she said.

The very next day, they did so. This Gennaro was a tall old man, somewhat toothless but still spry. For some months in about 1915, he had worked as office boy for a famous local lawyer. In the deceptive sunlight of Naples, this glorious past had been sufficient to make him the legal authority of the neighbourhood. In all seriousness, people called him the lawyer and consulted him on thorny problems. Don Gennaro normally held his assizes in a humble little bar in a back alley, where his presence gave a certain boost to the custom.

Concettina's account interested him. He started by mumbling a few phrases of the highest legal import—*ab intestat, de cujus*, non-consummation of the marriage—only to arrive all too soon at the verdict that, unfortunately, to the best of his knowledge, divorce had always been impossible in Italy. It would take too long and be too difficult to go into the religious considerations involved.

"He wants me to be divorced in a month," Concettina said, on the verge of tears.

Then, as if it would bring about a solution to anything that might happen, she held out a packet of American cigarettes. Don Gennaro took the packet and immediately, very much the man of the world, offered a cigarette to the Signora, and another to Concettina. When he had lit them, he passed his own to and fro with relish under his large hunting-dog nose. Then, putting his elbows on the little round table, and knitting his bushy eyebrows, he came to grips with the problem.

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" He really wants to marry you, this American?"

" Yes," said Concettina.

" But why?"

Concettina indicated by one all-embracing shrug that she had no idea.

Genna.o reached his decision. A client is a client; if he wants the moon, you must pretend to get it for him. " I could always start investigations . . . " That having aroused no reaction, Don Gennaro drove home his point: " There would have to be a small advance."

" No advance," said Signora Cutolo. The Signora's philosophy was based on not more than two or three maxims, but to these she clung tenaciously. One of them was that you should never pay in advance.

Don Gennaro made a quick recovery, and tackled the problem from the other end. " And your husband? It's a long time since he disappeared?"

" Three years."

" Then he won't come back."

Signora Cutolo sniggered in a knowing way. (Maxim Number Two: husbands don't come back.)

" Well," said Gennaro, " under these circumstances, you've only to tell the American that you've obtained your divorce, that everything's in order. He's a good fellow, this American. It wouldn't do to disappoint him."

They're a kind-hearted lot, the Neapolitans.

" That won't be enough for us to get married," said Concettina.

Still leaning on the table, his right eye winking in the smoke from his cigarette, Don Gennaro, looking like a veritable demon, pointed a blunt thumb at himself. " That's where I come in."

He took his time over it. Finally, " I'll marry you myself."

Signora Cutolo made rapid inroads on her experience of life. " A lawyer can't marry people," she said.

" Don't be silly, you'll tell him I am the registrar."

Signora Cutolo had only the vaguest notion of how registrars and other municipal officers should look; all the same, it was with a critical eye that she took stock of Don Gennaro, the holes in his waistcoat, his collarless shirt. " He won't believe it."

" In wartime . . . " said Don Gennaro.

" And how could you arrange for the ceremony at the Town Hall?"

Concettina opened her bag, took out her mirror, and began to put on some lipstick. It was all too stupid. She gave up the whole idea. Not so Don Gennaro.

" You'll tell him that in Italy, when it's a case of a second

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marriage after a divorce, the mayor comes to the domicile. Because of the scandal. That's quite natural. And afterwards, what are you risking?" And he crossed his fingers rapidly under the table. "He'll take you to America. And there, as to papers, documents, regulations—pouf!"

You'd have sworn he had passed three-quarters of his life in the shadow of the Empire State Building. Concettina, her mirror still in front of her, and one finger pressed between her lips, was looking at him thoughtfully.

"Well?" said Don Gennaro.

"You'll have to wear rather better clothes," said Signora Cutolo, without specifying whether this was to make the ceremony appear convincing or merely to add to its brilliance.

"Bah!" said the old man. "If you give me . . . four dollars—" the Signora's stony expression made him revise his tariff forthwith—"two dollars? Two," he repeated, gaining confidence at the silence of the two women. "For two dollars, I'll fit myself out like a lord."

He threw himself back in his chair, fished up an old napkin from behind. "Look at that! I'll use this napkin." And with the back of his hand he stroked it winningly. "Eh? This fine napkin . . ."

Thirty-two days later, preceded by a telegram, and a new money order to cover the wedding costs, Johnny arrived—by taxi this time, for he was so loaded with tinned food, cartons of cigarettes, two Moroccan cushions, oriental slippers, and a rug.

He was in the seventh heaven: he hummed a tune, he unrolled his carpet, took off his cap, put it on again.

It was the speed of the divorce that delighted him more than anything else. He admitted now that he had feared it would take much longer. Italy sure was a mighty fine country.

He thought it only natural that the mayor should come to the domicile—in fact, it seemed a rather graceful concession to local prejudice. And Johnny had knocked about the world long enough to know that you see some curious customs when you're in foreign parts.

On the other hand, he was rather pernickety on the question of papers. This decree, now, was it all in order? There were so many bogus lawyers about. When he wanted to see the papers, Concettina had enough presence of mind to retort that she had had to deposit the document at the Town Hall.

The next day she went straight to Gennaro to entrust this new worry to his care. Gennaro only laughed and, for a carton of cigarettes, agreed to concoct quite an attractive one on the spot.

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In the fervour of composition, he even added a few clauses that were extremely complimentary to Concettina, and went so far as to refer to her as a " veritable martyr to conjugal fidelity."

The wedding took place two days later, at Concettina's place. With a little rearrangement, the room looked quite imposing. Don Gennaro, with napkin, frock-coat hired from lord knows where, and, round his middle, a cummerbund made out of an old flag, cut a very seemly figure. He began with a close inspection of Johnny's papers; he commented severely on an inkblot he found on one of them, and declared that document, in his estimation, invalid. Johnny had great difficulty in reassuring him, and in the heat of this dispute he dared take no more than a glance at the divorce papers.

Don Gennaro then made him sign a register of sorts, delivered an address on the grave responsibilities of a husband—especially the financial ones—and wound up by claiming six dollars for his services—an improvisation that Concettina dared not oppose. Besides, Johnny found it a very reasonable charge. And, it should be noted, Don Gennaro immediately deducted from that six dollars sufficient for two bottles of wine—and, needless to say, invited himself to the wedding breakfast. " Ver' old custom napolitana," he confided to Johnny, who was more than ever convinced that Italy was mighty fine.

As for Signora Cutolo, she shed a few tears for there's no denying that a wedding, even a mock one, is always a moving experience for a sensitive mother. The tears became a flood when, in the course of the afternoon, she took her leave and made for the furnished room nearby that she had taken, out of consideration for the newly-weds.

And so passed the greater part of a year. Concettina was perfectly happy. And Johnny, too, to judge by his blissful expression and the more and more triumphant slant of his porkpie. While he was away with his ship, he sent regular money orders. When she went to the post office to cash them, Concettina would generally take a neighbour with her so that no one in the vicinity should be left in the dark as to her prosperity. That would have given rise to jealousy—but in Naples, of course, they are never jealous.

Thanks to the money orders, Concettina had smartened up her room: a divan had taken the place of the big bed; there was a wireless, a refrigerator, a new wardrobe. And, it goes without saying, Concettina was faithful to her husband. For the first time in her life she was in love.

Johnny, as we've seen, had a trusting nature. He talked

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freely about his happiness, and one day he was approached by a shipmate. This boy was also in love with a Neapolitan girl, whom he would have liked to marry—not so much for love as for her housewifely qualities—but as she was already married, he'd had to give up the idea. They'd made inquiries everywhere, at both Italian and American authorities, and all in vain. The answer was always explicit: no divorce.

"Bah!" said Johnny with all the eagerness of one who has found a loophole in the legal system. "There's always a way round. We'll go and see my wife about it."

And so one afternoon Johnny appeared, and in front of him, urged on by his friendly shoves, came another sailor, the size and shape of a wardrobe, and a Neapolitan woman, no longer in her first youth but with a kind face. Details of their case were immediately laid before Concettina.

"Tell them how you did it," said Johnny.

Concettina's heart sank. For her own marriage, that was all very well; but another one might lead to everything being found out. Besides, strangely enough, the fraud that she had found so legitimate in her own case, now, with the appearance of this other woman and this other sailor, seemed guilty, hateful, criminal.

"It isn't easy," she brought out finally.

"You got it in a month."

"I had a lawyer."

"Well, then," said the woman, "give us his address."

"Besides, my husband had been gone such a long time," Concettina went on. "Perhaps yours . . .?" She was trying to find some difference between their cases, but . . .

"Mine left me before the war," said the woman. "He went to work in Switzerland. I've never heard from him since."

"Listen," said Concettina, unable to think up any further deception, "these are very delicate matters. I daren't give you my lawyer's address until I've spoken to him. I'll go and see him."

For two days Concettina tried to forget all about it, but that was reckoning without Johnny's kindness. "When are you going to see your lawyer? We can't just leave those two in a fix like that."

So Concettina went to see Don Gennaro. He welcomed her with delight. "Perfect," he said when he had heard her story. "Send them to me. I'll look after them. No, on second thoughts, send the woman alone."

"Don Gennaro, you will be careful . . .?"

He made a lofty gesture.

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I don't know how he did it: whether he took the woman into his confidence or whether, having perfected his technique, he managed to dupe her too. At all events, a month later the wardrobe-sailor and the kind woman were married. Concettina was relieved to hear of it. And, when she saw how this threat to her happiness had upset her, she realized how much she had come to love Johnny.

Some months later, as she was passing through the Galleria, she was hailed by Don Gennaro—but a Don Gennaro so well-dressed and so prosperous-looking that she had difficulty in recognizing him. Cigar, straw hat, an attractive tan jacket, and an enormous watch chain from which there hung a series of lucky charms, a red horn the size of his little finger, a screech-owl, a figure of a hunchback, a phallic symbol—only a tiny one, in ivory—a medallion of Our Lady of Pompeii, another of the Madonna del Carmine, and yet another of Saint Januarius.

"I have my office up there now," said Don Gennaro, pointing to a window above a café. "That's the sixth, you know . . ."

"The sixth what, Don Gennaro?"

"The sixth marriage, of course. You brought me luck."

Concettina stared at him in horror. Don Gennaro looked embarrassed. Quickly he skimmed his hand over his lucky charms, and thrust it in his trouser pocket, while Concettina, equally nimbly, crossed her fingers to keep bad luck away. All in vain: the inevitable happened. One day one of the American husbands, in all innocence, applied for a passport for his wife. Three days later, Concettina came home to find Johnny busy packing up. He looked at her calmly.

"So it was all a cheat," he said. There was still a questioning note in his voice, as if he were hoping only to be contradicted. But Concettina made no move.

She had sometimes imagined this scene taking place, and she had always told herself that, after so many nights together and such constant happiness, she would be able to convince Johnny of her love, her good intentions, merely by throwing herself into his arms. Now the moment had come and she stayed there, on the threshold, not daring to take a step forward.

"Yes?" Johnny asked.

"It was because I loved you," she said.

He shrugged his shoulders, took up his kitbag and his little case, walked towards the door.

"If we love each other," said Concettina timidly, "does it matter that we aren't married?"

He put her aside gently. And then he was gone.

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Outside, in the street, the women watched him silently. He greeted no one—and he'd always been so polite, too.

Then the police arrived. They had come to arrest Concettina and to tell her that her husband—the mason—had died. An uproar broke out, for, if the husband was dead, why on earth should Concettina be arrested? In the ensuing commotion no one noticed Concettina break away from the jubilant crowd and start to run.

She was just in time to catch up with Johnny at the corner of the street.

*Translated by J. E. Malcolm*

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# SATURDAY NIGHT

*Dora said not by the front door*
*. . . the neighbours could see*

## BY ERSKINE CALDWELL

FOLLOWING a morning-long drizzle from the dismal sky, there had been a pelting summer shower in late afternoon, and when Clyde put away the leaf-rakes and grass-clippers and got ready to go home, the air was cool and breezy and the sun was beaming brightly over the western horizon. After leaving the tool shed, first having made certain that the door was securely locked and then putting the key into his pocket, Clyde shaved himself and parted his hair precisely down the middle of his head as he always did on such occasions. Then, watchful of the time, he put on clean clothes and shined his shoes.

It was another Saturday afternoon, and it made him feel good to know that he was going to spend the night with Dora. Even though he and Dora had been married for eleven years, each time he got ready to go to see her on Saturday night, which he had been able to do regularly every week for the past six months, he always felt as if he were courting her all over again.

Although neither of them took particular notice of it, a change had come over Clyde and Dora during those past eleven years. The passing of time, and circumstances had been responsible for the change.

Dora, who was now in her early forties, had grown stout and broad-backed, and through the years her bright blonde hair had gradually turned to a lustreless brown. Having always been proud of her appearance, however, and particularly during the past year when she had been a day waitress in the café at the bus depot, Dora had made it a habit to go to the beauty parlour once a week and have her hair shampooed and set in tight ringlets of curls. Clyde, who was in his middle forties, had grown thinner year by year since they were married and his shoulders were slightly stooped by that time. His hair had remained coal-black even though it was no longer thick and bushy, but there was still enough of it left for him to part it in the middle the way he liked.

Walking briskly into the office at the front of the building, Clyde looked up at the big round face of the clock on the wall

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just as the hands pointed to six o'clock. The round face of the clock not only reminded him of Dora, but also of the fact that it was the time when she got off from work at the café in the bus depot, and he hurriedly found his record card in the rack, jotted down the date and time, and signed his name.

Fred Holmes, one of the clerks, looked up from the desk where he was making out the daily reports. "There you go off again for another Saturday-night romp," Fred remarked with a wistful expression.

"Sure am," Clyde said, grinning. "The only trouble is that Saturday nights are too far apart to suit me."

"Tell me something, Clyde," Fred said, leaning forward on his desk. "Do you always have yourself a big romp every Saturday night?"

"Haven't failed yet," Clyde assured him. "Don't see why I should start failing now."

Fred took a deep breath and shook his head. "You don't know what a lucky son-of-a-bitch you are, Clyde. There're times when I wish I could trade places with you. Like right now. Just look at me. I've got to go home to my old woman tonight and hand over my pay packet." He laughed expressionlessly. "And what do you think I'm going to get for it, Clyde?"

With an understanding nod, but making no reply, Clyde left the big stone building and crossed the street. Instead of going southward past the courthouse and through the business section of town, which was the quickest and most direct way home, he went through the city park, passing the fountain and the lily-pond, and went straight westward towards the Gulf Coast and Western Railroad tracks.

It took him about ten minutes to reach the tracks, and when he got there, he started walking on the sleepers, counting them familiarly one by one until he had counted exactly a hundred and thirty-seven. Then he ran down the railway embankment and followed the path through the weeds towards the tin roof gleaming in the late-afternoon sun.

He did not mind the longer time it took him to get there, because he knew it pleased Dora, and he always liked to find her happy and uncomplaining when he got home on Saturday night. Dora had begged him not to come straight through town, saying it would be embarrassing for her to have people see him walking along the main street, and he had been taking the longer way home during those past six months.

It was still nearly half an hour before seven o'clock when Clyde opened the front gate and walked round the side of the house to the back porch. That was another thing Dora had

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begged him to do, because, she had said, it was embarrassing to have him walk up to the front door where all the neighbours could see him.

As he had hoped she would be, Dora was sitting on the back porch when he came round the corner of the house. She had got home from the bus depot only a few minutes before that, and, still dressed in the blue-trimmed white uniform that she wore during working-hours in the café, she was fanning herself with a piece of newspaper. Clyde stopped at the bottom step and waited for a smile of greeting from Dora, at the same time watching her inquiringly as he always did when he came home on Saturday night. Moment after moment passed while they gazed at each other as though neither intended to be the first to speak.

Presently, even though not a word had passed between them, Clyde came cautiously up the steps and went to the chair where Dora was sitting. Then, standing behind her, he patted her lightly on her broad back. She fanned herself faster and faster.

"Well, Dora," he said after that, "it sure is good to see you again. Every time I come back, it always seems to me a heap longer than a week since I saw you the last time."

Quickly turning in her chair, Dora looked at him with a darting glance. A moment later she got up and went to the door. There was a deep frown on her round face.

"If you want to know the real truth, Clyde Bickle," she spoke out in a sharp tone of voice, "I'll tell you what I think about it."

"What's that, Dora?" he asked, surprised.

Reaching behind her, she opened the screened door.

"Maybe it seems longer to you every time," she told him harshly, "but it's never long enough to suit me."

Before he had a chance to say another word to her, Dora had turned and gone into the house, loudly slamming the screened door behind her.

Clyde listened to the sound of her walking down the hall to the bedroom, and after that he sat down in one of the chairs, put his feet on the porch railing, and filled his pipe.

He was not worried about Dora's remark. She was always saying something like that when he first got there, and then later, as time went on and darkness settled down, she became her real self again. Towards morning, at dawn, just before he had to get out of bed and leave, she always cried a little and hugged him desperately in her strong arms and told him that she was sorry about all the mean things she had said. And after that, without fail, she always told him that she would be waiting for him when he came back the following Saturday night.

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Clyde had finished smoking the first pipeful of tobacco and was refilling the bowl when Dora came back to the porch. The sun had set and twilight was falling, but even in the shadow of the porch he could see that she had taken off the blue-trimmed white uniform and was wearing a summery pink dress. Clyde waited until she had sat down. By that time he was aware that the frown on her round face had become deeper and darker.

"Now, Dora—" he began.

"Don't you 'now Dora' me!" she said in a loud voice, frantically striking the sides of the chair with her hands. "I just can't stand this any longer! I just can't!"

"Can't stand what, Dora?" he asked, puzzled.

"You know good and well what I'm talking about, Clyde Bickle," she said at once. "The way you come here like this every Saturday night and get me so upset I don't sleep a wink till you go away again Sunday morning. I don't know why in the world I've put up with it as long as I have. Any other woman would've put a stop to it a long time ago."

"But I don't come through the main part of town," he reminded her. "You know I always take the long way round, down by the railroad tracks, just exactly like you said you wanted me to. Besides that, I always come round to the back porch instead of coming in the front door."

"I know, I know," she said, closing her eyes and tossing her head from side to side in a helpless gesture. "You did do that for me. I'll have to give you credit for sparing my feelings that way. But even that doesn't help any more—"

"Then what's the trouble exactly about, Dora?" he asked helpfully.

"It's those awful clothes you wear, that's what. Why can't you wear different clothes when you're here, instead of being dressed in those mortifying things?"

"But I do take them off when I go to bed, Dora," he reminded her. "And every time I do that, and hang them on the chair for the night, you always say it makes you feel—"

"That's different," she said quickly. "That's not what I'm talking about." She picked up the piece of newspaper and fanned herself with nervous motions of her hands. "Right now you're sitting there with them on like you're proud of it—while I have to sit here and worry myself sick for fear some of the neighbours might drop in for a visit. If that happened, I'd be mortified to death. All I ask is that you take off those awful things and wear something else when you're sitting out here on the porch."

"I couldn't do that, Dora," he told her, shaking his head

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determinedly. "That wouldn't be fair. I promised Mr. Ed Johnson I'd wear these clothes every minute of the time from Saturday night to Sunday morning, just like I do the rest of the week—excepting when I'm in bed. He said himself it wouldn't make sense to go to bed dressed up like that. We talked it over, and I know Mr. Ed Johnson trusts me, and I sure wouldn't go back on my word for anything in the world. Besides, if I did go back on my word, he'd take me off the trusty roll, and then I'd never be able to come home on Saturday nights again. And if that happened, it'd be the worst calamity I can think of."

"You could get transferred, Clyde," she said, lowering her voice and leaning closer. "Don't you see? If you got transferred from the county gaol to the city gaol, you wouldn't have to wear those awful striped shirts and trousers when you came home on Saturday nights. Everybody in the city gaol wears ordinary clothes, don't they, Clyde? Now, you'd do that for my sake, wouldn't you?"

Clyde shook his head time after time. He was leaning over the porch railing and knocking the ash from his pipe.

"It's true that the people in the city gaol don't wear stripes, but the city gaol don't have trusties, neither," he told her. "No, sir!" He banged his pipe on the railing. "I wouldn't want to swop places for anything in the world. I'm too proud to swop places, anyhow, because it'd be like getting demoted. The people in the county gaol are a higher class of folks than those in the city gaol. That's filled up with drunks and wife-beaters and pickpockets and other no-goods. All of us at the county gaol have bigger reasons for being there. That's why Mr. Ed Johnson can have trusties like me coming and going without lock and key the way we do. He knows we ain't ordinary crooks by nature. Besides I've worked hard to get to be a trusty, and that's something to be proud of. Nobody in the county gaol can work himself up higher than that."

Dora was crying by that time, and, before he could go to her and pat her back and comfort her, she left the porch and ran into the house. Clyde followed her through the hall and sat down beside her on the bed. For a long time he patted her broad back the way he always did when she had one of her crying spells.

After a while he took off his shirt and trousers and hung them carefully over the back of a chair just as he was in the habit of doing when he went to bed on Saturday nights. When he came back to the bed, he could see Dora watching him while tears streamed down her round face. He was sitting wondering what he could do to make her feel better when she reached over the side of the bed and smoothed a wrinkle in his striped trousers.

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" Clyde, I made the biggest mistake in my whole life when I had you arrested for non-support," she said, her voice quavering with regret. " I had to go to work myself after that, anyway, waiting on tables in that café at the bus depot, so I could support myself and pay the rent and buy clothes. While I was doing that, you got yourself made a trusty at the county gaol so you could come and go as you pleased, and not have to worry about making a single dime for rent and food and clothes. If I was doing it all over again, Clyde, I wouldn't have you arrested for non-support. I know now that it just won't work out in my favour at all."

He moved closer to her and stroked her broad back.

" I sure appreciate what you said, Dora," he told her. " It was mighty nice of you to say it. But the truth is, I'm sort of pleased about the way things turned out, after all, and I wouldn't want to change a single thing now. I've got so I like being a trusty and working in the sheriff's vegetable garden and taking care of lawns and shrubs for some of the deputies, besides being able to spend Saturday nights at home the way I do. Right now I couldn't think of a better way to live, when you stop and think about the way other folks on the outside have to groan and sweat at a job so they can get enough money to pay rent and grocery bills, and it'd make me awfully sad to have to give up what I've got. Just as I was leaving the county gaol this afternoon, Fred Holmes, one of the clerks in the sheriff's office, was saying to me that he—"

Wiping the tears from her face, Dora sat up beside him. He felt her warm arms tighten round his neck.

" Clyde," he heard her say after that, " Clyde, I'm going to undo all the harm I've caused. I've made up my mind to undo it even if it's the last deed I do on this earth. The first thing Monday morning I'm going straight to the courthouse and tell the judge I've changed my mind and don't want you charged with non-support. I'm going to tell him to let you out of the county gaol so you can stay at home all the time. I'll tell him about the good job I've got waiting on tables in the café at the bus depot and how I make all the money we need for rent and clothes and things like that. If the judge won't listen to me at first, I'll get down on my knees and stay there till he does pay attention to me. Nobody is going to keep me from undoing the harm I've done."

" But, Dora, I don't want a thing changed now," he protested. " I've got used to things the way they are, and I—"

" Now, you stop worrying, Clyde," she said, tightening her arms round him and hugging him with all her might. " From now on I'm going to see to it that every night is Saturday night. All I want you to do is ask the sheriff if you can bring home an

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old pair of those striped shirts and trousers for us to keep. I don't know what it is, but there's something about them that makes me feel all cosy and loving every time I see them hanging on the back of the chair like that. You'll bring a pair home to keep, won't you, Clyde?"

He took a long, deep breath before answering her. "I'll ask Mr. Ed Johnson about that and see what he says," he promised her at last.

Sighing happily, Dora leaned forward and tenderly stroked the striped garments on the back of the chair.

★ ★ ★

## *HEDGE HUSSIES*

The love affairs of Sparrows are not beautiful. I have sometimes seen the female grasp her mate by the beak, swing him off his perch and dangle him in the air. He kicks out with his feet and tries to regain his perch but is at the mercy of his ruthless mate who apparently gets satisfaction from torturing him, so she will not let go her hold for a minute or more. It is typical of this species to torment other birds and they do the same to their mates, or when courting.

A year or two ago, for purposes of identification, I rouged the cheeks of one Sparrow and the underparts of another, using some of Peter Scott's special dye, harmless to birds, which he uses on his Geese for the same purpose. To the human eye, the pink cheeks and breast greatly improved the appearance of the Sparrows but when I released them and they joined their flock there was a terrific babble lasting half an hour; the painted Sparrows were the cause, they were being mobbed, and that evening they had to leave my garden and never returned. A few weeks later I read reports of a rare, brightly coloured, foreign Sparrow having been seen in a town six miles south of my cottage . . .

LEN HOWARD,
*Living With Birds*

## *GAY BIRDS*

*Cuckoos lead Bohemian lives,*
*They fail as husbands and as wives,*
*Therefore they cynically disparage*
*Everybody else's marriage.*

OGDEN NASH, *The Cuckoo*

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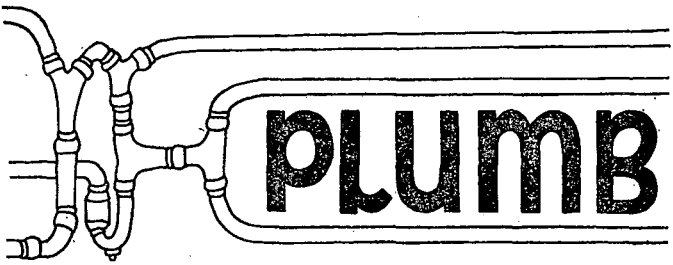


## *Undress Occasion*

THE formal opening of the bathroom was a gala social event, with a tray of glasses across the lavatory, ice and soda in the bathtub, and a bouquet of roses with Uncle Fred's card in a prominent position . . . I decided that nothing is more tangible for one's money than plumbing.

The small new room was filled with male Sykeses when we reached the point of measuring for the height of the shower. Moe was a realist. "Git in the tub," he ordered me. "Stand up straight. We'll git this right the sure way." I stepped in the tub and stood up straight. "Now whereabouts you want this here stream o' water to hit you? 'Bout there?" Four pairs of bright Sykes eyes helped us gauge the proper play of water on the bathing form, and I have never felt so undressed in my life.

MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS, *Cross Creek*

## *Soapless Passion*

"*And are you very fond of washing?*" "*I love it,*" *said Toad.*

KENNETH GRAHAME, *The Wind in the Willows*

## *Privy Stair*

"Maybe you'd like me to bile yer a kittle of water on the Beetrice, m'lady—*and*"—Mrs. Ruddle's tone suggested that this consideration had often influenced the wavering decision of prospective summer visitors—"*down* this 'ere little stair—mind yer 'ead, mum—everythink is modern, put in by Mr. Noakes w'en 'e took to lettin' for the summer."

"A bathroom?" asked Harriet hopefully.

"Well, no, m'lady, not a *bath*room," replied Mrs. Ruddle, as though that were too much to expect, "but everythink else is quite modern as you'll find—only requirin' to be pumped up night and morning in the scullery."

DOROTHY L. SAYERS, *Busman's Honeymoon*

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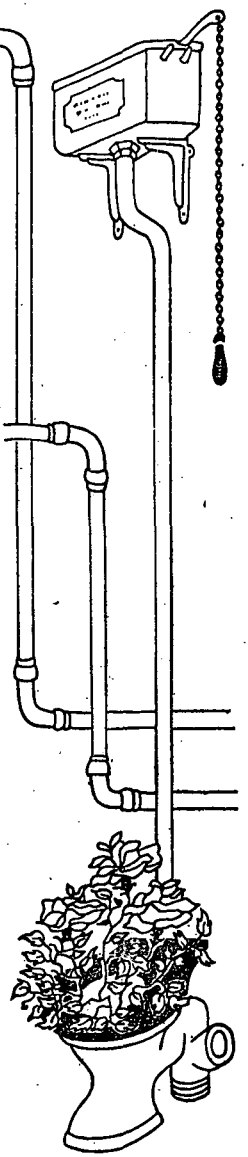
# LINES



## *Tale of a Tub*

IN the rear . . . she had installed what she and the neighbourhood plumbers believed to be a bathroom, the only one with running hot water in the rue de la Huchette.

The tub was enormous and had been smeared with boat paint a shade of grey that suggested wet clay. It stood on four legs like the feet of the fabulous fire bird. These legs were equal in length, but the floor boards were uneven, so that the tub, when one stepped in it, rocked from side to side like a cradle. The gas-heater had been purchased second-hand at the Flea Market.

ELLIOT PAUL, *A Narrow Street*

## *Loofalosophy*

*Baths, wine, and Venus make life worth living.*

*Epitaph, Author Unknown*

## *Swansdown Seat*

Fair patricians, eager with curiosity to know how such a one lived, and if possible, to learn the secret of her attractions to the young men of their acquaintance, throng to the deserted halls of "Skittles," and admire le cabinet with its seat padded with swansdown . . .

SIR WILLIAM HARDMAN,
*Letter to Edward Holroyd, December*, 1862

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## *Where Washing Ain't Wanted*

The intelligent and sensitive reader will doubtless have wondered at intervals throughout this narrative as to how Flora managed about a bathroom.

The answer is simple. At Cold Comfort there was no bathroom. And when Flora had asked Adam how the family themselves managed for baths, he had replied, coldly: " We manages wi'out," and the vision of dabbings and chillinesses and inadequacies thus conjured had so repelled Flora that she had pursued her enquiries no further.

She had discovered, however, that that refreshing woman, Mrs. Beetle, owned a hip-bath . . .

STELLA GIBBONS,
*Cold Comfort Farm*

## *Goes Without Saying*

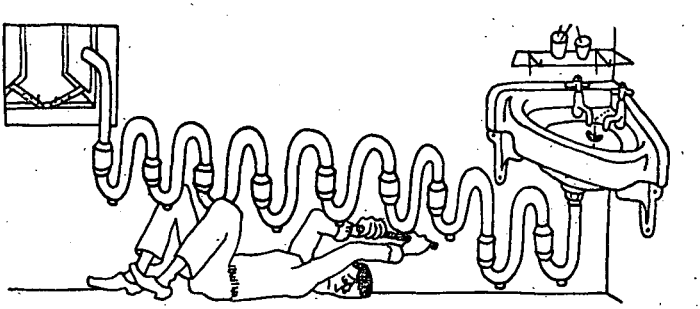
*It took a while to know that it was the bathroom. The bath was behind a curtain. The tub had a bridge across it, with a shaving mirror, a rack for magazines was within reach; there were also a submersible pillow and a head-rest.*

*Behind a door were what Elsie called " the unspeakable " and a washbasin . . .*

*" That monstrosity—the unspeakable porcelain fixture—even I haven't been able to defeat it. I have hidden it in a Louis Fourteenth cane chair in that closet next to your bathroom—and that's no solution either.*

*" They call every thing they design functional. Well, that thing is certainly functional. You know, if anyone designed a decent-looking bathtub and a decent-looking unspeakable, he would be terribly rich overnight."*

LUDWIG BEMELMANS, *To the One I Love the Best*



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★ *Once when he was taking tea in the Argosy offices Geoffrey Household confessed that among his stories "the mermaid one" was his own favourite. We think many readers will share his opinion, so here it is as our reprint of the month. Household made his name with his novel "Rogue Male," unique duel of endurance between the Nazi agent and the man in the cave, has also written "The Third House," "Rough Shoot," "Fellow Passenger."*

# NO ONE WILL EVER KNOW

## BY GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

THEY were so angry that they entirely missed the point. Their voices were hoarse with fury, and gasping for insults as for breath; so that, at the end, they never knew whether they had witnessed an atrocious crime or a supremely chivalrous act of deliverance. The little Andalusian was equally capable of either.

That fairground was no place for creatures compounded of fire or, perhaps, of water. Magnificently earthy was the crowd of tall Basques: farmers, fishermen, and townsmen full of the vigorous Rioja wine which rooted them to their soil and gave to their good-humoured spirits the cruelty and luxuriance of trees, overshadowing all but their own kind.

The town was two fields distant from the turbulent circle of lights. The sea was only a lane away, but lying unobtrusive in its summer silence. Bounded by the darkness of a ring of oaks, the fair became an individual world with its own repetitive pattern of life, gay in the clinking of glasses and money, the clattering of hoop-la rings, the clarion music of Spanish roundabouts, the cries of showmen and the popping of the shooting galleries.

Paco Igarzabal and Salvador Aguirre strolled tolerantly along the outer aisle of booths. They were well dressed, but showed their solidarity with fellow Basques by wearing boinas on their heads and no ties around their collars; only by an air of patronizing joviality did they reveal that either of them could have bought the fair and fairground.

They had visited the Six-legged Calf and the Hairy Woman. They now halted outside the booth of the Mermaid, feeling in

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massive pockets for small change. The entrance was not painted with any of the exciting monsters that decorated other booths. It was surmounted by a large, severe, and well-lettered placard:

PEJEMULLER AUTENTICA
*Genuine Mermaid*

It added, *Of Canary Island Waters*—as if there were different and no less authentic breeds of mermaid from other waters.

Paco and Salvador entered the booth and joined the half dozen men who were standing on the dusty turf before a curtained recess. The mermaid's proprietor, seeing that there was now a quorum, closed the stretched canvas door. He was a little fellow with slender, flaring nostrils, thin lips, and pointed chin. He looked more like a clerk than a showman, for he was dressed in neat, shabby black. A drooping bow-tie, though only a length of black tape, suggested the minor intellectual.

He delivered no advertisement, seeming to trust in the rarity of his exhibit. He turned out the central light, drew apart the curtains, and said, " Señores, look! " in a tone of modest pride, as if wondering that to him it had fallen to catch or make or care for the mermaid.

The glass tank was some five feet long. The top was open so that the customers could see it was brimful of water. The sides and the back were hidden by a stucco of pebbles and marine growth, some real, some painted. A faint green light illumined the *pejemuller*.

Her body to the waist was that of an undernourished girl of twelve, the breasts just forming. From the waist down she was the conventional fish. The tail was a marvel of its creator's artistry, for it sprang from the skin in little, irregular scales, leaving no definite line at which the sceptic could declare it to be attached. The scales grew larger over the full and powerful curve, sliding upon each other sleekly and naturally; then lessened as they passed, imperceptibly, into the smooth membrane of the flukes.

She lay supported on one thin arm, facing the customers. Her face was yellowish, and small even for her dwarfed body. The eyes were pale and expressionless. The sandy hair was long and sparse, and so tangled among the rock and seaweed at the bottom of the tank that it could not be said to float, or not to float. She breathed, sometimes violently, but no bubbles came to the top of the water. Her only other movement was a slight and graceful swaying of her flukes. This she performed as if it were a drilled duty, now forgetting for too long an interval, then offering an extra wave or two to show repentance.

Paco Igarzabal leaned upon the rope which divided him from

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this phenomenon, and gave himself up, with a lusty prurience, to close examination of its anatomy. He was a wholesale grocer and he best appreciated life when it was delivered in good coarse truckloads.

If they were not engaged in making money, Paco and Salvador Aguirre were boon companions. They played billiards together on two evenings a week; they went to the bulls together, and they visited the stews of Bilbao together. The chief reason for their friendship was that they did no business together.

Salvador was a man of some education; that is to say, his system of book-keeping was up to date; he could carry on the correspondence of his timber yard in correct Spanish; and he did not believe in God. He was not, of course, an atheist, for that would have been to identify himself with the enemies of timber merchants. He was immensely busy within the limited area of his interests, and his workmen called him the wood-louse.

Salvador twisted himself this way and that among the onlookers in order to examine the tank from various angles. He apologized importantly and continually, and at last delivered his opinion.

"I will tell you how it is done," he said. "There is a glass sheet which runs away from us diagonally"—he belched and had another shot at the word "—diagonally across the tank from top to bottom. Thus, friends, you see an unbroken sheet of water, but the mermaid is in an empty compartment."

"Then how does she breathe?" asked a fisherman. "There would be no air."

"She is wholly immersed in water," answered the showman, the Andalusian. "The *pejemuller*, gentlemen, does not, as I have myself observed, breathe like a Christian. She admits water into her body through a system of gills."

"But where?" roared Paco. "Where does she keep them?" He suggested several possible positions.

"Caballero!" protested the showman abruptly. "Be decent! She can hear."

The *pejemuller* showed no sign of hearing. She waved her tail in languid response to the enthusiasm of the world outside her tank.

"But can she understand?" asked Salvador Aguirre with a precise little smile. "She seems to me to be an idiot."

"She understands as much as you," replied the Andalusian with a show of courtesy.

Paco shouted with laughter, and slapped his friend on the back.

"I say it is a little girl," declared Salvador, his wrinkled face working with an excited obstinacy that hid humiliation. "I say that the tail is of coloured scales of mica, and that diagonally—"

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"It is a *pejemuller*," interrupted the showman.

"It would not be your daughter, perhaps?"

The face of the Andalusian burnt and went white as ash. "It appears I am among brutes," he said.

"And whom, señor, do you call a brute?"

"Since you have said, señor, that I would exhibit my daughter—"

"Man, I said there was a diagonal and—"

"There is no diagonal."

"There is a diagonal."

"You know as much of diagonals as of your father."

"You lie!"

"Stupendous bastard!"

Paco Igarzabal swayed forward his big frame between the two smaller men.

"Let us see, friends! let us see! What is this? Are we going to kill one another for a little difference of opinion? This gentleman says that there is no diagonal and that, by logic, the *pejemuller* is a *pejemuller*. My companion says that there is a diagonal, and that the gentleman is, perhaps, exhibiting his afflicted daughter."

The Andalusian leapt at him, just as Paco expected—for he was never one to miss a chance of sport. Paco grabbed him by the opening of his black waistcoat, and held him at arm's length. The Andalusian twisted and stamped, answering the renewed insults of Salvador who was kept back by Paco's other arm.

"Let us see!" repeated Paco. "A little calm, gentlemen! All this for a diagonal, that can be settled in a moment!"

"Son of a dog!" hissed the Andalusian.

"Big names!" Paco answered, unaffected. "How much will you take to show us the tank?"

"More than I paid for your mother," the Andalusian retorted, and spat in his face with a clean trajectory parallel to the arm that held him.

Paco Igarzabal barked with anger and flung him to the ground. Onlookers crashed down upon the struggling men, trying to separate them. The tank rocked on its trestles and spilt water over the edge. The mermaid held her pose, ceasing only, since no eyes stared at her, to move her tail.

At last the tumult of bodies cohered into two groups. The fisherman, huge and benevolent, held the Andalusian. Paco and Salvador were surrounded by the rest of the onlookers, all counselling prudence at the tops of their voices. Not a word could be distinguished in the uproar. The tent heaved and shook as passers-by pushed down the door to listen to so magnificent and delectable a row.

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Paco was now more angry than Salvador—if, indeed, there could be any choice between two men who were living in a fantasy of rage—but, seeing himself surrounded by fellow townsmen who were wont to respect him for his supercilious calm, he choked on his stream of oaths and shouted at the Andalusian in a voice that quivered with the effort of control: "Listen, you! This is to end all argument. I will buy your mermaid and your tent! Understand?"

This astonishing offer brought silence. The Andalusian seemed to recoil as if his spirit were about to leap into passion beyond the reach of all humanity. The fisherman who held him tried with sincere simplicity to conciliate.

"Sell him the mermaid at your price, friend!" he said. "Don Paco has money. And thus—in peace!"

"Ten thousand pesetas," offered Paco.

"I am a gentleman," answered the Andalusian, each word a slow, reluctant gasp of pain. "I carry on this vile trade among brutes who have no upbringing, but I am a gentleman. You have called me a liar. You have said that this unhappy thing is my daughter. Now you think that for your money—" His voice rose to a scream. "Where, among whom am I? Ay, my pride! My shame! Unnameable degenerates! Must I show you what it is to have a heart?"

He fell upon his knees, and the fisherman, not knowing whether this unexpected limpness was a mere feint or the illimitable appeal of a defeated soul, rested a light, embarrassed hand upon his shoulder. The Andalusian dived beneath the rope and flung himself upon the nearest trestle.

The green light went out. The tank thudded on the ground, and the water flopped in two solid masses against the canvas of the booth. The plate glass tinkled and crashed as the Andalusian flailed it with the trestle.

Men fumbled for the switch, heaving and swearing in the corner where the showman had turned off the central light. No one crossed the rope to enter that shadowy hell.

White light glared. At the back of the booth stood the Andalusian, the trestle in his right hand, his left around the waist of the *pejemuller*. She clung to him with her arms round his neck, pitiable as a shivering monkey.

She was even smaller than she had seemed in the tank; her tiny yellow head was against his cheek, but the glittering tail did not reach his knees. Except that she clung to what she knew, she was not human.

The Andalusian walked through the tent and over the prostrate

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door. He still held the trestle in his hand, but it was no fear of physical violence that parted the crowd of powerful Basques. He passed under the harsh lights of the roaring fairground, blood and filth upon his face, clothes dripping water. He walked proudly. What march, what music of sunlit trumpets he heard—that, too, was accepted by the onlookers. They followed.

He took the lane to the sea, where, beyond the circle of trees, only the softness of the night gleamed on the black and changing mirrors of that marvel which flapped against his thigh. He strode over the rock and down to the boat-slip. The ripples of the Atlantic, inch-high, hissed as they parted over the descending stone.

"God guard thee, little friend!"

He loosened the thin arms from his neck, and flung the *pejemuller* into the night sea. She took the water cleanly, rose once, and went under, her tail seeming to flick the starlit surface.

"And now—leave me in peace!" cried the Andalusian.

Unnoticed, uncared for, he stumbled away across the rocks. The crowd were arguing, shouting with a recrudescence of anger, gaping into the darkness for another sight of the *pejemuller*.

In the morning, when they wanted the Andalusian, he had gone, leaving behind him only the debris of the tank, impossible to reconstruct. They understood that he had flung away his living for the sake of his honour; that was no thought foreign to any of them except, perhaps, to Salvador. But what it was that he had flung away neither high-tide mark nor the passing of the months disclosed.

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# VAGABOND'S GOLD

*The gipsy turned in his saddle, and his eyes met hers*

## BY ISABEL ADAM

THE servant girl held the door just open and no more, letting a thin ray of light filter through the soft spring rain to a tall, cloaked figure on the step.

"I tell you again," she was saying in a plaintive voice, "ye canna see the doctor this night."

"But I must, my lass—come tomorrow I'll be many miles from the High Street of Glasgow, and I have something of great importance to say to him."

"Ye canna see—"

"Come in, sir," I said.

As I led the way to my consulting room I remembered that my friend Mr. James Watt—he who is making such a stir in the world with his new steam engine—was bidden to supper, and that Agnes my wife had been most particular that I finish work early for once. But I have never yet learnt how to turn away a patient.

The stranger threw down his cloak and his shabby gold-laced hat, and stood warming his hands by the fire. He was an exceedingly tall man, with an air of command. His white hair needed no powder, and his clear eyes and rosy, weatherbeaten cheeks suggested that he had little use for physic.

"I have come," he announced, while the firelight drew rich tones from his coat of plum-coloured velvet—some such style, I imagine, as the gentry sport in France—"with a message from the dead."

I am accustomed to dealing with deranged minds; this was not one of them. I waited.

He plunged a hand into his coat and brought out a handsome gold repeater, laying it carefully on the desk before me. Then he unwrapped from a scrap of silk a small dark object, like a dried-up twig.

"These, my boy, are from your father. He died of a fever at The Hague two years and three months ago to the day, and he sent you his blessing and his most precious possessions."

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I turned the watch over gently in my hand.

"I hardly knew him," I said.

"He was my best friend," the old man continued, "the best and the bravest. The repeater he received from a Very Exalted Personage, not to be named, as a reward for saving his life. This," holding up the battered little stick, "I don't know—but I was to take great care to put it into your hands."

I took it and ran a finger over the surface. And suddenly I remembered a summer morning long ago . . .

I was barely two years old when that dismal tragedy we call the Forty-five broke over Scotland. My father took up arms with the Chief of his clan, and his Chief followed the Pretender. When the sorry business came to an end, my father fled the country with my lord Marquis, and a year or so later word reached my mother that he had been killed in some remote foreign war.

All this, of course, I was told when I grew up. The first memories with any reality for me are of a village on the borders of Ayr and Galloway where I lived with my mother, my stepfather the blacksmith, and a new baby brother. I was aware that there had been an earlier life out of which my mother had brought me, together with Dapple, our handsome white pony, when she came south to marry the blacksmith; but I could distinguish no personalities in it.

My stepfather seemed an old man, cold and grim. But my mother was all kindness and beauty. She had the night-black hair and the petal-clear skin of the Celt, and her eyes glowed with a warm golden light. Her touch was always gentle, even when, in the grey of a certain June morning, she had to shake me awake.

"Get up, Willie my lamb, do you mind what day it is?"

It was the dawn of the great annual Fair, held on a moor a mile beyond the village. Everyone who had anything to sell went there to try his luck among the wrestlers, pedlars, and gipsies who came pouring in from the four corners of Scotland. And we had something to sell, my mother and I: Dapple, our white pony.

"He's all we have of our own," my mother had explained, "and if we can sell him for gold, then when you're grown you can go to Glasgow College and be a man of learning."

I had no wish to be a man of learning—I wanted only to keep Dapple for ever—but my mother's mind was made up. I, barely nine years old, was to ride Dapple to the Fair, and on no account to let him go under five golden guineas—which sum, my mother did not doubt for a moment, would keep me in luxury at the famous College until I had attained to wisdom.

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I set off with a heavy heart—next to my mother, Dapple was my nearest and dearest—but somewhere along the road the sun came up. When I reached the moor the bustle of the Fair had begun, and my gloom disappeared like the dew.

I think this was the first time I noticed the beauty of a summer morning—the air fragrant with clover, the singing green of the fields, and the Firth which ran sparkling by the great boulder of Paddy's Milestone. A lark warbled like to burst its throat straight above my head, and I talked comfortably to Dapple about the time when I would be a rich man and buy him back.

Sometimes I walked him about, skirting the Fair booths; then I would come back to my stand at the horse market. Nobody looked twice at Dapple. To while away the time I carved a whistle out of a rowan twig, and played myself a bit tune.

*Will ye go to the ewe-bughts, Marion,*
*And wear in the sheep wi' me?*

I had no idea what it meant, but it suited my mood, sad and happy at once.

About noon I was sharing my cheese and bannocks with Dapple, when I was aware of a tall, ragged man, one of the gipsies, standing at a little distance, chewing a straw. He strolled past me and turned back.

"You have a fine animal there, lad," and his eyes twinkled like the Firth behind him, "but you'll be asking a great sum for him?"

I named my mother's price—not to be thought of, I knew, by the like of this fellow.

"It's a lot," commented the gipsy, "and him not in his first youth, but if anybody tries to take him for less, come for Tammas the Rhymer"—he held up a sunburnt forearm and flexed a noble muscle—"the Champion of Scotland."

He gave Dapple a pat and strolled on. But later, through the long afternoon, when someone would look Dapple over and offer a paltry price, Tammas the Rhymer would appear miraculously at my side. He didn't speak to me again, though, till the evening, when my corner of the moor was deserted and I had begun to realize, with a mixture of joy and dismay, that nobody was going to buy Dapple.

"You see," the gipsy said, stroking Dapple's nose in a way he loved, "they wouldn't understand why anybody in his senses would want to part with such a fine horse."

I was very near to tears, and in a moment or two he had the whole story. He considered it in silence. Then he said slowly, "Maybe I could bring you to one who would pay your price—who but the Queen of Elfland, that True Tammas serves?"

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My mother had told me many a tale of Elfland—how in the gloaming a man might follow some faint, unearthly music till he came to a green hillside; then the hill would open and swallow him up, and he would never be heard of again. I was very frightened.

But there was that in this man which would have garred me follow him into the sea.

He led us away from the Fair, where torches were rippling on the night air, and a piper had struck up a reel.

"Give us a tune, lad," he said, when the piper's notes had thinned in the distance.

I played my favourite, *Will ye go to the ewe-bughts, Marion?* and he took the whistle and replied with a gay, foreign air. We came to a planting with the tents and horses of the gipsies about it, and followed a path under the trees. In a little clearing a woman with bright golden hair and a green dress was stirring a pot over a wood fire.

"Kneel, lad," whispered the gipsy, "it's holy ground where the Elf Queen is."

He knelt beside me and then led me forward by the hand. The woman looked up from the pot, whence arose a delicious smell of rabbit stew.

"Sit down, Thomas, and have done with your fooling. There's enough for the brat, too, if he wants it."

She ladled out an ample supper for both of us and Thomas, diving into the undergrowth, emerged with a bottle of French wine, pouring a bumper for me as well as himself, and pledging me with great solemnity: "Son, we drink to your future."

When we had scraped our plates clean he took the golden-haired woman aside and seemed to be arguing and pleading, while she demurred. Then I saw him swing her on to Dapple's back and make her a low bow. She laughed down at him—in the half-dark of the summer night her face seemed to be made of moonlight.

Suddenly she slipped to the ground. "My lord Marquis!" she said quite loudly. "—Get the boy out of this."

Dapple and I were pushed behind some bushes. There was a sound of approaching hoofs and presently the man they called my lord strode forward to the fire and thrust his hands towards it as if the night were cold. He was the tallest man I had ever seen.

"Supper quickly," he called. "I ride again tonight."

The wine had made me sleepy—I must have dozed. When I woke, the night was very still.

The gipsy was standing over me.

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"Time to go home, lad," he said, "and here's your gold."

He thrust a small, heavy bag into my hands, and half led, half carried me along the wood path. Very soon we were on the open moor. As we walked he began to tell me wonderful tales—of storms at sea and black-bearded pirates; of battles surging round falling cities; of southern lands where golden apples hang thick on the trees and they dance slow sarabands under the warm stars.

"But you'd see never a woman there as fair as your mother, son, nor as your lady-wife, who'll be yours one day. And never a sight like your ain fireside."

We had reached the road just above the village, and the blacksmith's cottage lay among the shadows, waiting for me. Without a word the gipsy was gone.

My mother opened to my stealthy knock, and drew me in, counting the gold pieces as I whispered out my tale. There were a hundred of them—wealth beyond her dreams. She doubted sorely that they were fairy gold and would be gone in the morning. But in the morning they were bright and hard as ever, poured out on the kitchen table, and my mother was still terrified. When, about the middle of the forenoon, we heard a great hubbub of wheels and horses, it was all I could do to persuade her to come and watch the gipsies go by.

There was no one among them the least like the Queen of Elfland, but I soon caught sight of Dapple, his reins held loosely by my friend True Tammas, who was riding a brown roan with a splendid air. Just as he reached us he flung the reins across Dapple's neck and tapped him lightly on the buttock. Dapple came trotting to his own stable, and the cavalcade moved on.

My mother had become pale as snow. Suddenly the gipsy turned in the saddle and his eyes met hers. The lovely colour came pouring back to her cheeks, and as she stood there with the blacksmith's baby in her arms her face shone with a kind of triumphant joy which made the bright morning light about her seem dull. Tossing through the air, hitting her soft neck, came a white wild rose. She picked it up, but her eyes never left the proud figure on the roan till the tip of his bonnet had disappeared under the crest of the hill.

In a sudden wave of melancholy beyond my understanding I felt in my pocket for my whistle. Then I remembered that the gipsy had kept it.

. . . And now at last it lay on my desk, beside tomorrow's list of visits.

I had forgotten my guest. The old man sat stroking his chin, watching me with a half smile. Suddenly I found myself getting

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down on one knee—don't ask me where I learnt such a trick.

"My lord Marquis," I heard myself say, "I am more than grateful for these memorials of my father and—and I offer in your service my poor person in place of his."

"Tush, man," burst out the Marquis, "such goings-on are not for the like of you. Your father was proud that you had become a man of learning and substance. Oh, he knew, all right; we have our friends, even in the douce city of Glasgow. He knew when you graduated M.D. and when you courted the Professor's pretty daughter in Kelvingrove woods. He could tell me the very house I should find you in!

"And now, young man, I'll be on my way—for you must know I am come from Paris to bargain for some Paisley gauze—and when the King comes into his own again, you'll not be forgotten."

"At least," I said, "you'll drink a glass of claret with me, for auld lang syne."

As I let him out the bells of the Tolbooth were ringing for nine o'clock and his hurrying tread, soon lost among the chimes, seemed the very footsteps of the past.

There was a rustle of silk behind me.

"Willie," Agnes pleaded in an urgent whisper, "supper's getting wasted, and Mr. Watt has been here near an hour—and there's not another thing I can find to say about steam engines."

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# THE RACE ACROSS OUR MEADOWS

*One gay foot forward*
*she whirled to the wild, sweet music*

## BY EDMUND GILLIGAN

LONG before the arrival of these seven Italians and their wives and children, there had been many Italian families living in and near Gloucester, the old town by the Yankee sea. Some of the first Italians had become dorymen in the fishing-schooners. The best of those dorymen had become skippers on the Grand Banks and, later on, they bought shares in vessels or had new ones built on their own account.

They were very brave at sea and always gave a good account of themselves in time of trouble.

The seven newcomers weren't seamen. They were stonecutters who had learnt their trade in the marble quarries of the old country and had come to work in the stone quarries of Cape Ann. It was said by the older men in Folly Cove, where we lived, that the seven Italians had been brought from Italy, in the first place, to work on marble soda fountains in Boston. Something had happened to that enterprise, so they found work in our quarries.

Just the same, they had done well in Boston. We considered them well-to-do. They looked it, and they paid good prices for houses and gardens, all in a row in Cherry Lane at Folly Cove. They began making good wages because there was a call for stone to build jetties and piers along the Atlantic coast.

All their women had black eyes and gold ear-rings. All the young girls were black-eyed, too, and beautiful.

At least, that's what the young men and boys on our side of the lane thought. The women had a fondness for the gay dresses and jewels of their native land, and they kept up its genial customs in other ways.

They were great hands at merrymaking. They made wonderfully good music on guitars and accordions. When there was a wedding or a feast day, we could hear the lively music long after moonset. The weddings were bang-up affairs, like nothing we had ever seen. Pennies were thrown out by the handful so that we could scramble for them, and all the kids in Folly Cove had Italian ice-cream to eat and little cakes with round blue candies on

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them. Sometimes they gave prizes at games—hurdle races and jumping-games.

In the cottage closest to the meadows, there lived a man named Rosario. Rosario Something-or-other. I never could spell his last name. He had a wife and one daughter. At the time I speak of, the daughter was too old to go to our school. That means she was seventeen or eighteen. Whoever caught a glimpse of this Italian witch fell in love with her. I mean, if he was any good at all, he did so. Otherwise, he didn't.

Once I almost understood this business of falling in love. We were watering a mare in a man's barn one day, a mare that was in season and very droopy. This man was Will Wandenberg—something like that. There were many such names amongst us and I never did know how to spell them all. He was a brisk young cattle-dealer with yellow hair, and he was the first man on Cape Ann to keep the black cattle called Angus. He never followed the sea. Not that one. He just sold fine beef to the captains of the schooners and the draggers.

"Pretty?" I heard him say to the other man, whittling in the sun. "Why, man, she's the sweetest ornament—" He didn't finish the sentence, perhaps because we came by with the water.

I used to lie under the grapevine and stare at that girl an hour at a time. She was better than a valentine picture. They never put anybody like her on our valentines, even the lacy ones that cost eighty cents. Her black hair came down over her shoulders in curls. She'd sit in the morning sunlight and brush it a long time, counting the strokes of her brush, which had green jewels on it. She always counted aloud in Italian, and her voice seemed tender. Now and then she'd stop counting and gaze at herself in a round looking-glass. She was always delighted by what she saw. You can be sure about that.

I crept into the grapevine arbour behind her house so many times and listened to her so many times that pretty soon I amazed everybody, even Miss Hoyt, our teacher, by speaking Italian in an offhand manner. "Uno, duo, trio. Sì, sì!" But I never told them how I learnt so much.

One day, two strange things happened. The first was good, the second was not good at all.

The leaves of the grapevine were quite large, now that summer was passing. The grapes were early ones. They were green in colour, had no seeds, and were sweet. This wasn't an Italian vine, not one they had planted. It was very old and grew thick in a cedar arbour that was very old, too. There had been a great mansion on that land hundreds of years before. Now it had been gone a long time, and the place was haunted because of a beautiful woman murdered in the night by a mean old squire. So nobody would go there.

Only me. All I had to do was give the other boys the slip—duck away, you know—and then I could eat the grapes and look all I wanted at my little Spanish sweetheart. In those days, all real

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sweethearts came from Spain. I mean their images. Although for us, I fancy, they were all mostly on cigar-box covers.

Well, the leaves were so large that I thought myself safe in creeping up closer to her. There was fairly thick grass, even under the arbour, and I was pretty small. I slid up closer, took off a bunch of grapes, and looked out at her.

"Uno, duo, trio—"

Perhaps she was getting ready for a feast day. Whatever the reasons, she had on a new dress, one with stripes of purple, white, and some other colour up and down. She had two more rings on her fingers and—an odd thing!—she had no stockings on. I had a feeling, at first, that I shouldn't stay. But I did stay.

Her nice bare feet were in red embroidered shoes. Such gay shoes and not having stockings on would have been disgraceful, except for the fact that she never, never left her home, except to go to Mass, her father on one side, very stern in black, and her mother on the other side, twice as stern and ready to glare if anybody turned a smiling head. Only twice did they have other company. This was a young man named Roberto, who was a draggerman. I found out later he had been two years in the dragger *St. Margaret* with Captain Sears. I didn't think much of him at first, even if he did wear a fine straw hat on Sunday. Well, you can be sure that the girl wore stockings on those days. Yes, and something neat over those curls, too.

On this day, I'd been watching her about ten minutes when she got up quickly. In a step like a dance, she put down her brush, and half closed her eyes in the special glance she always gave to the looking-glass. She came on in a glide over the flagstones of the garden walk and flung up her arms. They were quite long, it seemed to me, held up that way, and they shone.

"Ah! Ah!" And after that she made a longer sound which startled me because it was the first word I had ever heard her say except in counting. And she said it in passion. I don't mean the passion of anger. I mean the other. Her lips had stayed apart. She brought her hands to her breasts and pressed them. She darkened and her eyelids went down all the way again. When she opened her eyes, she fixed them directly on the arbour.

My heart began an awful beating, worse than the strong beat after a race. For a moment, I thought she had spied me out in the grapevine. I forgot this in the other things that she suddenly did to me. First she sang, just as I had often fancied her singing to me, and to me alone. We hadn't much music in Folly Cove, except the jolly tunes the Italians played, and I had never heard so close a woman's voice in a real song.

Oh, it was a wonder! It was like the up-and-down-the-scale song of the hermit thrush on a bare bough, a song those birds made up about falling water. And yet, her song had a queerish meaning to me. Maybe in her foreign words she was singing, "Ah, you Gloucester imp in the grapevines—do you think I haven't seen you all this time?"

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I say this may have been so because she showed something of the sort in the next wild thing she did. This was really a disgrace. She thrust one gay foot forward, then the other; and in silence she whirled. Around and around she turned in silence, and with such skill and force that her skirt and the lacy petticoat lifted higher and higher on her naked knees and flew up until her white thighs gleamed. This was all part of that " Ah! Ah! " business.

I was never to watch her in secret again. Only once, only once more. She showed me that by a dancy rush towards my hiding-place, a click of her fingers, a stamp of her heels, and, " I see you, naughty boy! I see you all the time."

She ran away to the house.

All the time, there was a man lying secret behind me in the grass, and he groaned.

I grew cold. The ghost! Before I could even turn my head, I knew that all they had told me was true and that I would pay up now for my grapes and all my secret joys with her.

I became chilly in fear and pressed my face into the turf and waited for the bony hand to collar me. No doubt, I had a clear idea of the punishment a ghost gave small boys caught stealing grapes in the ghost's own arbour. And then—in just another tick of time—my common sense and my childish bravery helped me out. No ghost could walk in the broad daylight, not even in the green shade of the grapevine.

In this common sense, I was helped by a blow against the earth. It was struck so hard that I turned to see. There he lay, stretched out, face down, his right hand striking the violet leaves. I remembered him at once, even without seeing his face. If I hadn't guessed who it was, I'd have slipped through the vines like a thieving squirrel.

It was Roberto, the draggerman of the *St. Margaret*, the one that had come courting her. That's what they had said of him. When he lifted his head, I saw that he wasn't as happy as he had been on the Sunday walks with her and her father. No, he was just about the worst-looking sight I ever did see, all the colour out of his face, his eyes staring at nothing. He was shaking all over.

I said, " Hullo, Mister Roberto."

He didn't answer yet awhile. He looked at me, looked away, and, still with his head turned from me, answered, " Hullo. I'm sorry—very sorry—if I bother you."

I pulled down a bunch of grapes and began eating them. Maybe I was building up to a lie, making believe I was there only to steal grapes and not to spy on that girl.

I said, " These grapes are sweet and they have no seeds. I'm the only one that comes round here." That was a hint to him and I was ready to spring the ghost on him, too.

He sat up, leaning on his left hand, and holding his right hand to his forehead. He whispered to himself and then he said, " My God, oh my God! "

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That wasn't only a sin, it was a strange thing to say. I said to myself that if he wanted to carry on like that he ought to do it in Italian. Just the same thing, but then people wouldn't know about it.

Now I began to pity him. Why, I don't know. Perhaps it was because he wasn't so happy as he had been when he was squiring her down the Sunday streets.

"Have some grapes, mister?" I held out the half-gone bunch.

"You are very kind. Thank you. No."

I suppose it really was kind of me to offer him the ghost's grapes. I did feel it would do him lots of good if he filled up a bit on them because the juice flowed thick and sweet down your throat the moment your teeth crushed the skins. That's the beauty of grapes without seeds: you don't lose any juice in spitting out the seeds.

The draggerman then did a smart thing, the first smart thing he had done all the time. He reached into the pocket of his coat, took out a coin, very large, and held it out to me. "Please!" he said, with a beseeching smile.

"Sure as shooting," I said, closing my sugary fingers on the coin with no delay at all. This was pretty good work on my part. I say that because I had never got that much money in my life without working for it, and you may be sure that if the grape wine hadn't consoled me for the loss of my sweetheart over yonder, then the coin fixed everything.

He smiled again and I began to like him even more. "You'll say nothing, my friend? Nothing about me?"

I nodded. I wouldn't ever make a promise and break it. But what was there for me to say about him? He'd done nothing but groan and strike the earth. Why should I run around telling that, and who'd listen, anyway?

I couldn't help thinking that for all his good looks and wealth there was something odd about Mr. Roberto.

"What are you up to, mister? I've seen you with her before, I guess. I've seen you in the *St. Margaret*."

He made no answer. He just looked at me. I didn't care for his staring at me like that, especially because the sun was getting low and the inside of the arbour was so gloomy his face shone pale, pale as the face of a ghost. And his eyes burning, both of them. Just the same, he didn't frighten me. I knew I'd be up and away like a rabbit before he could lift a hand, and I knew he could never catch me for all his long legs, Italians not being fast runners.

I don't know how long it was he stared like that—a goodish while, anyway—before I made out that he wasn't looking at me at all. He was looking over my shoulder, and if it was really the ghost he was staring at, he couldn't have stared harder.

There wasn't anything much going on in her garden. Just her mother had come out with a little table in one hand and a chair in the other. She set them down. She stepped away and turned back again. After a glance down the walk of flagstones, she shifted

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the chair and the table. There wasn't anything to that. All the same, my friend—yes, a friend all right—watched each move in a sharp way. I don't suppose he missed any of her expressions, such as they were—only contented smiles, far as I could see.

A voice inside the house called to her loudly. Rosario's. She bustled into the house and came back again, this time carrying a bottle, a tall one, full of something to drink, something good and sweet, I thought. It was a yellow liquor, and in it, just where the evening sunlight was shooting down the garden, there were little flowers on silver branches. Not silver exactly. More like the twigs of birches after a frost.

At this, the young man rose to his feet and stepped deeper back into the shadows.

"What's the matter with you, Mister Roberto? You don't look any too good to me. No, you don't."

Now out came Mr. Rosario himself. It surprised me to see that he was in his church-going black suit. He was all washed, too. This meant that he must have quit work an hour or so early, for the voices of the other stonecutters were ringing in the quiet lane beyond. More than that, this stern man seemed almost gay. He strode lightly towards the little table. Between his fingers, he held three small glasses; that is, the fingers of his left hand were closed on the delicate stems, and the tiny cup parts shone in his hand like Italian jewels.

I had to laugh inside me at his next action. He glanced down the walk, just as his wife had, and said pleasantly, "Oh no, no!"

He made a strong gesture with his right hand. She had to move the table and chair back to exactly the same place where she had first placed them. He then put the glasses down near the bottle and stepped back a pace to see how things struck him. He was pleased. I could understand that easily enough because the yellowish sun rays were passing through the bottle and falling on the glasses. That's what he was fussing around for: the look of things.

This was just about all I needed to show me that there was more in this business than I could make out. Of course, they were great drinkers of wine all the time, the Italians were; and they drank other things, like the stuff in the bottle. Yet I had never seen this fussing around in all the days I had watched.

Mr. Rosario took several steps away, turned towards the house, and straightened up to his usual stern way of looking. The delight left his face. He began to play another part. Seeing this, she whispered a respectful question. At his nod, she gave her black, tight-bound hair a smoothing pat and entered the house. I had a feeling she wasn't quite sure of herself because at the door, where there were roses all around, she hesitated and looked back at him.

"Ah!" he said in a low voice, "ah you!" He lifted his right hand and made a sort of flutter with the fingers. It clearly said, "Do go on, wife! Everything will be all right. Is not Rosario here?"

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I thought it high time I took a backward glance at my tall friend. Nothing going on there. He was just the same. Half out of his head at the sight of three small glasses and a bottle full of sunny stuff. He didn't speak to me. He spoke to himself and said these words in forgetfulness of me: "But mine! mine!" He was like to choke, so harsh his words came out.

A stranger came out of the house. This was a portly man, well-dressed in the clothes of the city, and about Rosario's age. There was ever so much more style to him than there was to Rosario.

In the first place, he wasn't a working-man. His hands were almost as white as the elegant cuffs of his shirt, and he wore a grand moustache that certainly took a lot of time to fix up every day, it was so nicely curved and pointed. At first glance, my father would have called him a double-damned dandy, and he would have been right, as usual. This stranger shone in every way a man could. He had a diamond ring on his left hand.

Either because he was really pleased at the scene or because—more likely—he wanted to make believe, he raised his hands in a gesture of delight. He opened his mouth, held it in a big O, and then let out an exclamation in Italian. It sounded just like "Well, ain't this nice!"

Listen. It stands to reason that a man like that was used to grand affairs, and I'd have been willing to bet my half-dollar that he'd drunk up a thousand bottles like that in much grander places. He breathed the evening air in deep. This was a kind of lie, too, because how could the evening air smell sweeter than the air inside the house? All the windows were open and there were roses everywhere.

Next came Mrs. Rosario. She was up to something, too. All the times I had stared at her I never saw anything but a cold look and a hint that nobody walking the earth was better than she was. None of that now. Oh no. Even to me, it was quite plain she knew she stood in the presence of her betters.

Can you imagine what kind of high-falutin' business she tried next? Why, she greeted this plump stranger with a smile and a bow, just as if he had got in and out of her house without seeing her. And he played right along with her. He ran off a long musical sentence and brought his head down and his hand up to his watch-chain, all like a big prince in a book, if you can figure a prince in blue serge and a gold chain curved over his belly.

It was all this bowing and scraping that began to frighten me. I really couldn't make head nor tail of it. Just the same, I knew it was bad, bad for me, bad for the young fellow behind me in the darkening arbour, and bad for—ah, where was she?—my little Spanish sweetheart. Where did she come in? I was all sharpened up by this time, and right off I said to myself maybe she wouldn't come in at all because there were only three glasses, which meant none for her, even if she did take wine and that yellow stuff. I didn't think she was that kind, it being rated a sin in Folly Cove for any lady to partake of intoxicating liquors.

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I took a step nearer my friend and whispered, "Mister, I don't know what to make of all this funny business. Do you reckon we ought to clear out of here? It's getting on for supper-time, anyway." He didn't even favour me with a glance. What he had to say he was saying to himself, and I guess I wouldn't have liked it.

Now Mr. Rosario took his turn nicely. He held out one hand towards the chair and waved the stranger to it. Oh no! The stranger turned his white palm towards the chair and waved Mrs. Rosario to it. Oh no! A thousand thanks, gentleman, but I couldn't think of sitting in your royal presence. After all this polka, he sat down and touched his diamond finger to the port bulwark of his moustache.

No sooner was he settled there than all their fancy words and signs and bowing came to an end. They were waiting for the next actor. I mean, of course, the next actress. There couldn't be anything else to wait for, unless it was the crack o' doom.

Not from the doorway, but from the far side of the house, out of the other door, she came, at last. Now I understood why she had put on a new dress. It was for this occasion. Not for me, not to dazzle a little peeker in the vines. Soon as I could take my eyes away from her pretty face, I looked for her bare legs. For some reason or other, it was a relief to me that she had put on her stockings. White silk. I took this as a sign that she wouldn't dance and whirl her skirts so high. This I didn't want because I didn't want any more groans.

I was right, too. But she did something almost as strange.

Although the others were in plain view, she managed to ignore them. She didn't do this impolitely. She just did it. She sauntered towards the arbour, and by that I mean she paced slowly, her action smooth, her high red heels clicking from stone to stone in a graceful way.

I began to feel poorly again. For the life of me, I couldn't make out my trouble. She came on nearer and nearer until I could see the dark lashes down over her secret eyes. She swayed and turned away from us and began again, pacing like a proud filly on a barn floor at an auction, only she didn't need any sweating stable-boy hanging on to her halter. She knew what to do all right.

And all the time, those three gazed openly at her: Rosario with pride, his wife with pride, and the stranger in a keen, judging way. He was plainly taken by surprise. Maybe he had been told some things and hadn't really believed them until now. He showed it by the very carefulness of his actions. All he did was bring his hands together. Once the white fingers met, they closed with a fierce grip. At this, Rosario gave a glance over the stranger's head to his wife and his wife returned it gladly.

I now understood what was going on. The idea of the filly had led me to the truth. My little Spanish sweetheart was up for sale.

And if I knew this, didn't the draggerman know it, too? Mr. Roberto? Brave as I was, sure of my running feet and the peace of

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Folly Cove to run to, I couldn't stand the thought of turning again to him. Not that there was any need of turning. Nothing had happened to make his cheeks rosy again and to put out the fire in his eyes. Nothing.

I heard a dragger calling to Independence Wharf, and the skipper a moment later blew a signal for his wife and children. This was for me.

This came from my father, home again from Sable Island Bank, and a hundred and fifty thousand pounds of Sable haddock ripped and gutted in his pens. That's what the three short blasts at the end were for: " Nellie dear, we took a hundred and fifty thousand and all is well, sweetie-pie. Nellie, put the kettle on and we'll all have tea."

They would drop off a dory at the entrance to our cove, and he and the cook would row laughing to our beach. I had half an hour yet.

" Francesca! " So that was her name.

At her father's call, she began to turn towards them.

" Francesca! " At her mother's call, she turned, and—dear me, what a sad thing to see—she put on a look of quaint surprise. Why, her eyes and parting lips declared innocently, have you been there all the time, Papa? And you, Mama? And you, stranger, with your hunger for me?

A glance of delight flashed between Mr. Rosario and Mrs. Rosario. The Boston stranger rose grandly and began a bow. This he could not do properly because if he kept on bending he'd have to take his eyes off the girl, wouldn't he? It was a thing he couldn't do because she was too much for him and she was coming nearer and showing pace by pace more of her points. Everything nearer and nearer to his eyes.

He couldn't stand it long. He came to meet her. Only a stride and not a grand one at all because she had upset his apple-cart all right. And when you come down to it, his legs probably weren't much good to him, anyway. I had the feeling that he might fall over pretty soon, he was shaking so.

She glided up to him. He held out his beautiful hand. Not to shake hands, you know, but to take her hand and perhaps bow over it and kiss it to show he was all for her and nobody need worry any longer.

For her, this was going too far. What? For a girl who had been whirling barelegged a little while earlier? No, I mean that she had to pretend that it was going too far. This is how she showed it: she stepped back, just as if she had been frightened, and looked in appeal to her mama. What did this stranger wish to do to her and was it all right for him to do it?

" Si, Francesca." Her mother managed the words all right, even if she was almost giddy with pleasure at this display of correctness. Just as if she hadn't stayed up half the night drilling it into her, every step and gesture.

So she let him take her hand, and the little white thing almost

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vanished in the embrace of his moustache. He pressed her hand to his lips. Only an instant, for she couldn't stand the touch of his big red lips, even if it was only on her hand. She took the hand away almost violently and bowed her head over it, giving me the notion that she was secretly staring at the kissed place. Or maybe she had been told to do that, too. I wouldn't put it past that mother of hers.

Her father didn't take that any too well. But the mother knew all about it and she drove off his sudden frown by a quick sign. All was well. She then advanced one step. At this, Francesca turned away from them and, taking to the flagstones again, walked slowly away. I saw that her face had whitened. She had her lower lip under her teeth and she pressed down hard. Before she could turn away to the other door, she had to come six or seven steps nearer to us.

I nearly cried out to her to cut and run! She was almost stumbling. The tears pushed out under her lashes. Her breath came quick, and her hands twisted one into the other so hard that I couldn't look any longer.

So I looked at Mr. Roberto to see how he was taking all this. Well, he was down on his knees and his head bowed, and if he wasn't praying, then it looked very much like it. A fine time to pray. No, I'll take that back. Maybe it was the right time, if he really meant it.

She went into the house.

It was time for the others to finish the thing off. They did it in slow style, all at ease, all sure of themselves and her. Mr. Rosario did the honours of the bottle. He held it a little while and gazed into its colour, which was fading because the sun had gone down and the dusk of the grape arbour had gone up the walk to the table. I couldn't see their shadows any more. This dusk made the bottle gleam as if the moonlight were shining on it. Perhaps this warm holding of the bottle was part of an old-country custom. I don't know. All I'm sure of is that he seemed to enjoy it all right.

He made quick work of opening the bottle. He tipped a few drops into the glass nearest to him. After that, he filled the two glasses away from him and then turned the bottle back to the first glass. He filled it. All three looked at each other politely, the glasses up before their big eyes. With a rise of glasses and a rolling of their eyes, they drank.

After that, the men went into the house, leaving Mrs. Rosario over the glasses. She stared at them a while, like an old woman telling fortunes by tea-leaves soggy in a cup. She had got rid of that grin. Now she was like her old self: very stern and dark.

"What's on your mind, mister? What do I do for the money? It's getting dark now. Did you hear that dragger blowing? That's my father and I must meet him on the beach."

"You are a good boy. A good son of a good father." I could tell by the look on his face that he was fishing around for something

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to say—anything—while he thought up the next thing he meant to do about Francesca.

The supper lights were coming on in the houses.

"I must go home," he said, "to get something. You will watch this house and see if they go out and if she stays. You will bring me here tonight? If you please."

The way was hard, through rocks and briars and over a brook with alders. That is, it was hard to come into the haunted place up the back paths, and I knew he didn't wish to be seen. "I'll do that," I said.

And I did. After supper, my father had to see one of the men who owned the dragger with him, and I walked part of the way with him. I saw Mr. and Mrs. Rosario and the Boston stranger, very chummy, going down the road to Gloucester. I turned back into our lane, where it was dark under the elms, and found Mr. Roberto waiting for me.

The "something" was a guitar. That's what he had to go home for. He followed me over the brook and through the briars, holding his guitar high up. When we got into the arbour, he gave it a touch or two. I didn't quite understand what he was up to. It was explained to me later—by the sheriff's men—that it was what all those foreign people call a serenade. You get under the loved one's window, or as close to it as you can, and beat away at the strings. If you've a good voice, you sing too. All about whatever you've got on your mind. In most cases, this makes the singing quite sad. In this case, at first it didn't sound sad to me or like anything much. It just wasn't the real thing. I could have done better myself, if there'd been a piano in the arbour, because I was through the third book with Miss Noonan.

Next he made the guitar speak out, almost like a boy shouting. He stopped and whispered, "Go up quietly and see if there's a man in Francesca's garden."

I went right to the end of the arbour. There was no man. Only Francesca, half hidden near the door.

So I told him, and he came up and said, "Now!" He stood right in my special place. He tightened a string, bent his head, and breathed close to the guitar. Perhaps he whispered to it. Well, in the next instant all hell broke loose in the arbour. That's what my father used to say about the dragger hit by a gale, and I say it about Mr. Roberto and his guitar because the strings just roared out a demand for personal attention. No, it's wrong to say that all hell broke loose. That's shipboard talk and I shouldn't say it. I should say all heaven broke loose in our arbour and that I do say.

The music hit me like a north-easter sweeping the beach of Folly Cove. As God is my judge—which is something we don't often say—I never heard such beautiful music in all my life, in or out of church. It must have made trouble all over the place, and I guess that it was wild enough and sweet enough to have made

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even Mrs. Rosario sit up and take notice and maybe smile decently. But she wasn't there.

" Francesca, lovely one, step forward in your beauty! " That's the signal he was sending. No doubt about it. Out she came, out of her hiding-place, and all I saw was her ghost-pale face and the gleam of her bare leg under her skirt when he ran his fingers across those strings. This hurt me. She had taken off her stockings again, although she knew I couldn't be there at night.

" Stop! " He kept her there like magic, one shining foot in front of the other. He made the whole night silent I could hear the tide galloping out of Folly Cove in the black of night. Mr. Roberto had it all arranged. He had everything planned just right for that music Everything had to wait in silence because he was up to something

What was he waiting for? Light. He wished to see her answer to what he was about to say. Words wouldn't do in his case. He had to see. I could hear my heart beat in that awful silence. I shut my eyes so that I wouldn't see even a sign of her through the broad leaves.

So he waited until the thing happened that he knew well enough must happen at that very tick of the clock. The moon rose out of our sea. " Francesca! I am waiting. Come! "

Oh, what he did then upon those strings was beyond all they had cried out before! Sea and moon, moon and stars, gales and calms, he made them all cry out to her in a clamour and a deep chorus underneath that drew her on, pacing slowly down the moonlit flagstones. She was real and unreal by turns, and always shining in her eyes, her lips, and in her half-lifted hands like a child groping. I saw her eyes close down, at last. His music closed them, and still she came on, slower and slower until she was only an arm's length from the outer leaves of our arbour.

All at once, he changed. He stopped his sea music and began the other. Very low, so low I could hear the tide again. And then, just as sweet and low as the string music, he began to sing.

I shall hear no more of such singing, never, and I don't want to. Even my heart, which had nothing to do with it all, couldn't stand it. So how could hers? How could her heart stay silent when into it this music was sent? This was a man singing in a voice that had called out many a sea order in the burst of gales on the Grand Banks. Yes, and had sung to her there too, in the darkness of his forecastle bunk when the gale had blown out.

He loudened voice and strings. Just as if he knew he had failed, he began again to plead. And I—I couldn't stand it. I couldn't make out why she paused on the flagstones and the moon pouring down on her dark hair.

I went forward and, on my knees, I took out my knife, drew the blade up, and in three strokes I cut the vine there. I pushed it aside and held the leaves back for an entrance, and I cried out to her with all my heart, " Francesca, this way! Come with us, Francesca! "

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The music stopped. She drew me out of the arbour by a sign of both hands pleading together. In my joy, I couldn't move.

I looked at him.

"Go, my little friend!" He, too, was full of joy for our victory. Kneeling there, the paintings on his guitar showing in the moonlight, he touched off the final note and silenced the strings by a flick of his hand. "In the name of God, my dear little friend, bring her to me!"

So I did go out and I did stand before her where she knelt, all so beautiful. I was very brave. I didn't care whether Mr. Rosario came out or not. I reached out and touched her hand, and both her hands closed on mine. Thus we stayed, close together. Only her eyes were shut and I couldn't see into them.

She opened her eyes and at the same moment she spoke to me. It was bad enough to see her eyes, at last, so very close. The low tone of her voice added something I could hardly bear. And she spoke so sweetly to me, just as if we had been good friends a long time. She knew all about me.

"You speak Italian quite well, they say. Let me hear you, dear."

"Uno, duo, trio." She nodded and stayed in silence a little while, just gazing at me. I said, "Will you come with us now, Francesca? Mister Roberto sails again in two days. That I know."

"Repeat after me, dear little friend." She hesitated and gave a sigh and said, "*Addio per sempre, mio grande amore.*"

It was too much for me. I couldn't do it, couldn't get the words in order until she touched my cheek and whispered them over again and then once more. "*Addio per sempre, mio grande amore.*"

I did it. I said it so well in a whisper that she touched my cheek again and smiled and said, "Good, dear little boy! And now—now you will say that to Roberto for me?"

"You say it! Oh Francesca, you say it! He'll be so glad to hear you say it."

She didn't hear me. She didn't answer. All she said was, "And also, dear, for him"—and she drew me suddenly close and kissed me on the lips, and the sweet touch of her lips was awful, awful because the kiss somehow made me sad. There was no joy in that kiss.

"Now go, dear." I stepped backward, hating to take my eyes off her, she was so pretty. I had never seen her except by sunlight, and now this other light made her long curling hair so pretty.

She rose and lifted her hand. I kept whispering the long Italian sentence over and over, all the time while I was watching her. When I went into the arbour, I turned for my last look. She had vanished. All I heard was a click somewhere.

Now he was kneeling as before by his guitar. I came up laughing and said, "Roberto, Mister Roberto, she sends you this!" I kissed him on the cheek. "It's a kiss she sends you, Mister Roberto, and all is well and she tells me to say this to you in Italian which I speak very well—"

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"Ay?"

"*Addio per sempre, mio grande amore!*"

He bowed his head a little more. He got up and said no more and we parted in the lane, not one word said between us.

They kindly explained to me later that this sentence was a message of great love, also that it was a farewell.

"It's dimes for this wedding. Not pennies. What do you think of that, Timmy my boy?"

It was Mr. Gannon, the grocer, who gave me the news. I had come into the store with the money for our grocery bill and I was watching him make up the bag of candy that he always gave me on settlement day, which is what they call it in the draggers when the men receive their shares for the fish. That's what we called it at the store too.

"Dimes, Mr. Gannon? Dimes?"

"Ay! It's to be done in style this time, Timmy. Dimes instead of pennies. Twenty dollars' worth of dimes—all new—I got at the bank yesterday for Mr. Rosario. Be on hand early, my boy."

As I said, what they always did at the Italian weddings was this: at a certain moment, just before the marriage, the father of the bride scattered handfuls of pennies for us children. This was one of the customs they kept from the old country and all of us approved of it. Yes, indeed.

And it was dimes. Right in the midst of the music, all the guitars and accordions going, and wineglasses clinking, and everybody gay and excited, Mr. Rosario came down to the front gate with a tiny white basket trimmed with ribbons and flowers, and he cried out, "Good luck, children!" or something like that in Italian. Up went his big hand and away came the stream of coins, falling down to us on the turf and flagstones. All the boys and girls scrambled for them and I did, too, picking up dimes as fast as I could.

I was laughing, and thinking that Mr. Roberto inside the garden with her would be glad to see me getting so rich, when all of a sudden comes a hush beyond, then a great noise and a clash of bottles and a great crying out of voices, men and women, and the first thing I knew, up came Mr. Roberto in a white silk shirt running smoothly towards the gate, a smile set on his face, but it was whiter than I had seen it on that night in the arbour. Over the gate he jumped. Thinking this was a race, a part of the jolly wedding, I shouted to the others, "Come on! come on!" and I leapt the gate just as high as he did.

In the lane, he flung up his arms and began running towards the sea.

"Wedding race! Wedding race!" I heard them calling out behind me while I ran faster and faster after Mr. Roberto until I caught up with him and began to run by his side, he being a friend of mine. Quickly we left the cottages behind us and on he ran

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into the first meadow, and I at his side all the time he crossed it, swerving lightly from the hummocks and the wild-rose bushes which would have caught his shirt and torn it.

Halfway across that meadow, I ran a little faster, just to show him what he was up against, and I looked over my shoulder, first to see his face and then to see how far behind the others were, for I could hear many shouts and children crying. He had the same smile on his face. And I was surprised not to see anybody coming into the meadow after us. This was because we had a head start.

Now we came to the first brook between the meadows. I gained more on him because I turned a little to the right and skipped over from stone to stone while he was plunging through the water and the watercress. So I slowed up in the next meadow, and cried out, "To the oak, Roberto, and back again!" This was our race sometimes: to the broken, hollow tree and back to Cherry Lane.

He made no answer. All I heard was his breath whistling and a moan of excitement. He kept straight on, which was wrong because the next brook—Cranberry Brook—is deep and muddy. So I shouted again and laughed because I could win if I wanted to: "This way, Roberto, this way!"

He came in behind me, and I led him fast across the footbridge and on and on up the meadow where it rises to the cliffs of Folly Cove and the sea far below. I took short strides then to get ready for the jump across the spring that flows there out of an old well. The old green frog at the edge whizzed away. Over I went in a great jump, but Roberto fell down into the watercress. I heard him cry out. He came forward on his knees, gasping and crying out, so I turned back to help him.

He fell again before me, his hands outstretched in the grass and flowers. I was so high up now that I could look back along the way we had run. I saw the others. I couldn't see the other boys. I saw four or five men running hard. I stood on tiptoe and raised my hands and shouted, "To the oak! The oak and back!"

One man halted and turned towards us. But he couldn't win, no matter how fast he ran, because we were so far ahead.

I looked down at Roberto. My heart, which was thumping strong, stood still in a way that almost made me sick, because there was something in his right hand stretched out on the turf. It was an iron thing, a thing of metal and ivory, that I couldn't quite make out. I came up to him and parted his fingers, he being a good friend of mine. I saw a little revolver lying there.

"What is this, Roberto? what is this? Do you fire it for the race?" This was what I had seen at the big school.

He groaned and lifted his head. What I saw in his eyes, looking so sadly, told me I was wrong about firing it for our race and I felt poorly again, so poorly that I took the revolver between thumb and finger because I hated it for a reason I couldn't yet understand.

I ran away to the split rock yonder, not far, and there, as usual, the big water-snake lay, taking the sun. He began shooting his tongue out at me. Didn't mean a thing.

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"Scoot!" I yelled at him the same way I always did, and he hopped right off into the grass. Just where he had been coiled up, I laid the revolver down. This was in the split of the rock and there were little flowers growing there, cinquefoil, and the revolver sank out of sight in them.

I ran back to Roberto. Before I could speak, he caught my hand and whispered in a sad, begging way, "Hide me! Oh, hide me, my little friend!"

What could I do for my friend except what he asked? I ran on, saying nothing, and he followed wearily until I stopped at our secret robbers' den, the wide oak tree, hollow and broken off by lightning the year the *Susan Snow* was lost with all hands and in sight of the cliffs of Folly Cove.

I pointed to the robbers' entrance and in he glided and fell headlong on the leaf-strewn floor. There he groaned so loud I could hear it above the mingling of the tide. Slack water, it was.

I ran back to the snake's rock and jumped up on it because a man was shouting nearby beyond the alders. I took up the revolver.

"Roberto! Roberto! Timmy! Timmy! Where are you?"

He saw me. It was Policeman LaRue, brother of the priest, and a friend of all of us and now the best runner next to me. He came up to me slowly, his face tired with sweat and sadness, and he looked at what I had in my hand.

I said to him, "Mr. LaRue, I thought it was a wedding race, like the time the mate of the *St. Margaret* got married. So I ran and he ran."

"Timmy, my little friend, there's no race at weddings nowadays. Not even Italian weddings. Only dimes. Dimes and wine." He came up and took the revolver.

I said, "I took it from Roberto when he fell."

"Ah, Roberto fell. He fell." He didn't raise his head, just kept looking down at what he held in his hand. He said, "Timmy, somebody is dead at the wedding in the lane. So they called me from my sleep. Because I am on night duty, Timmy, I was sleeping."

"Yes, Mr. LaRue." I wished to ask him who was dead at the wedding in the lane. Then I didn't wish to hear him say.

He asked me, "Where is poor Roberto, Timmy?"

"I put him in the robbers' den, Mr. LaRue."

I jumped down from the snake's rock.

Mr. LaRue didn't have to tell me what to do. I ran down the path to the oak tree. He walked slowly after me. When he said, "Roberto! Roberto!" I ran away again, just a little distance.

Roberto came out and Mr. LaRue held out both his hands to him, and cried out, "God have mercy on us, Roberto!"

Roberto staggered towards him, crying so hard the tears ran over his cheeks. He would have fallen again if Mr. LaRue hadn't caught him in his arms.

"Mine! mine!" I heard Roberto say. And, "I paid my money. My three thousand dollars, Mr. LaRue." He also said

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something about a life worse than death, but he didn't say whose life would be worse than death. He just said it in a queer sort of panting jumble.

The last I heard was Mr. LaRue saying, "Ah Roberto, why didn't you go to the padre? Or come to me? to me even?"

I ran. Away, away I ran, faster than ever before. Over the meadows, over the brooks, but not into the lane. No, I ran through the other alders and up the stony hillside where I had led Roberto, and into the grape arbour, full of sunlight and full of murmurs from her crowded garden.

Soon I caught my breath and soon I parted the upper leaves of the grapevine and I peered out where I had watched her brushing her pretty hair all the long afternoons. Uno, duo, trio.

Against the wall of the house, I saw the Boston stranger, his face white and sagging. Stiff and stern, a red bandanna in his hand, Mr. Rosario stood near him, staring at nothing. Near him his wife knelt and an old grey woman stood behind her, one hand on the head bowed before her.

I knelt down and parted the lower leaves. There I saw the priest, the younger one, kneeling and praying in a low voice, his hands clasped in front of him like the hands of a little boy, white and small.

Between me and the priest, there she lay, quiet in her wedding gown.

I was late, yet I was in time. I made the sign of the cross and I asked the mercy of God on the Boston stranger and on Mr. Rosario and his wife. I said it quite loudly because who among them could hear me? "Have mercy, oh Lord, upon poor Roberto. Have mercy, oh Lord, on my little Spanish sweetheart."

It was hard for me to get up, I was so dizzy. I was very thirsty, too, from the race across our meadows, so I reached up and took down a beautiful bunch of grapes. I crunched them quickly between my teeth and the juice ran sweet down my throat as good as drink. Then I ate more slowly, grape by grape, because it was the last bunch I would ever pick there because our arbour was really haunted now. It had to be.

* * *

## *SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144*

Across. 1, *Sinking-fund.* 7, *Tip.* 9, *Argus.* 10, *Mad Hatter.* 11, *Allot.* 12, *Sergeant.* 14, *Marconi.* 17, *Abreast.* 18, *Torrent.* 20, *Dull dog.* 22, *Bothwell.* 24, *Lithe.* 26, *Tremulous.* 27, *Gripe.* 28, *Nay.* 29, *Empiricist.*

Down. 1, *Stalagmite.* 2, *Niggler.* 3, *Inset.* 4, *Gamps.* 5, *Underhand.* 6, *Diametral.* 7, *Titania.* 8, *Pure.* 13, *Staggerers.* 15, *Open house.* 16, *In the soup.* 19, *Rookery.* 21, *Ditties.* 23, *Loser.* 24, *Logic.* 25, *Eton.*

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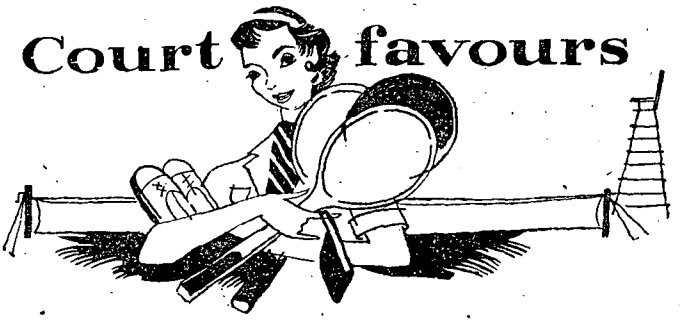


*Oh! would I were her racket press'd*
*With hard excitement to her breast*
*And swished into the sunlit air*
*Arm-high above her tousled hair,*
*And banged against the bounding ball*
*" Oh! Plung! " my tauten'd strings would call,*
*" Oh! Plung! my darling, break my strings*
*For you I will do brilliant things."*
*And when the match is over, I*
*Would flop beside you, hear you sigh;*
*And then, with what supreme caress,*
*You'ld tuck me up into my press.*
*Fair tigress of the tennis courts,*
*So short in sleeve and strong in shorts,*
*Little, alas, to you I mean,*
*For I am bald and old and green.*

JOHN BETJEMAN, *The Olympic Girl*

## *Set To*

Frank . . . was winning as fast as David could put balls into the net, but he still wore that filthy flinty face, withering as an east wind. Frank's general attitude, his snappishness, his aloofness, had put him off altogether, and he could neither concentrate on the game nor capture that breezy enjoyment which always characterized his play. A love set had already gone against him, and Frank had won two games of the next . . . At all costs he mustn't behave as Frank had been behaving for weeks. And what was to happen afterwards? Somehow he must expunge from his mind all Frank's behaviour, as well as his own wretched performance in this nightmare of a match.

As they crossed over, David saw that his shoelace was untied,

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and he bent down in the marker's box by the net to remedy that. And then he was aware that Frank, instead of walking grimly by, had stopped by him, and then came his voice.

"I say, David, I'm a rotter," he said. "I'm awfully sorry."

For one second the devil took possession of David. It would serve Frank right to say, "Oh, don't mention it," in the sort of voice that Frank had been using lately, and to proceed to lose the match as soon as possible . . . But the next moment all that was swept out of his mind. It was Frank who was sorry, so what did it matter what he had done?

But Frank still lingered. He laid his hand on David's arm.

"David, do buck up," he said. "It's all my fault. For God's sake pull yourself together, and take the stuffing out of me. You can."

E. F. BENSON, *David of King's*

## *Fair Play*

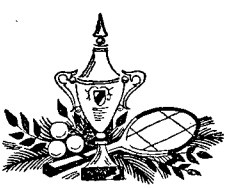
*Lawn tennis may share her favours fair—*
*Her eyes a-dance and her cheeks a-glowing—*
*Down comes her hair, but what does she care?*
*It's all her own and it's worth the showing!*
*There's no such gold and no such pearl*
*As a bright and beautiful English girl!*

W. S. GILBERT, *An English Girl*

## *Ruling Passion*

My Grandpa Mulock was the handsomest, most beloved, and truly delightful person . . . He and my grandmother were a devoted couple. One day a caller, being taken for a stroll by Grandpa, noticed enormous disorganization going on in the garden. "Yes," said Grandpa, waving his stick at the seething labourers, "my wife's straightening the tennis-court with the house." Commiserated with, he patted the visitor's arm and added, "I'm only so *thankful* she didn't take it into her head to straighten the house with the tennis court . . ."

SHEILA WINGFIELD,
*Real People*



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## *Wood Wind*

I remember an incident that caused great joy to a large gallery in Philadelphia during a match between two prominent local players. One of the men had been charging the net and volleying consistently off the frame of his racquet, giving a wonderful display of that remarkable shot known the world over as "the mahogany volley." His luck was phenomenal, for all his mis-hit volleys won him points. Finally, at the end of a bitterly contested deuce game in the last set he again won the deciding point with a volley off the wood, just as a small insect flew in his eye.

He called to his opponent: "Just a moment, I have a fly in my eye." The disgusted opponent looked up and muttered: "Fly? Huh! I'll bet it's a splinter!"

WILLIAM T TILDEN, *The Art of Lawn Tennis*

## *Love Match*

*When as the hand at Tennis plays,*
*And Men to gaming fall;*
*Love is the court, Hope is the house,*
*And favour serves the Ball.*
*This Ball itself is due desert,*
*The Line that measure shows*
*Is Reason, whereon judgement looks*
*Where Players win and lose.*

*The Fault, whereon fifteen is lost*
*Is want of Wit and Sense;*
*And he that brings the Racket in*
*Is Double Diligence . . .*
*Now at the length good liking proves*
*Content to be their gain;*
*Thus, in the Tennis-Court, Love is*
*A Pleasure mixed with Pain.*

*Fishing and Shooting, 1720*

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# TWICE UNWELCOME

*Hostile eyes came round slowly and stared at me*

## BY MICHAEL BARKER

FOR years I had been promising to make the visit. My cousins had gone to live in Cornwall; they had flung away the doubtful amenities of city life and had sunk everything into a farm overlooking the sea. This had been six years ago and constantly they had showered me with invitations to go and stay with them.

Now I had accepted. An unexpected fortnight's holiday had been conferred on me, and on the spur of the moment I had sent a telegram saying: *On my way, love Peter.*

The next morning, I had thrown some clothes into a case, filled the tank with petrol, turned the car onto the Great West Road, and set off. It was a beautiful day and, in the early morning, fresh empty roads greeted the singing of my tyres. With or without company, no one could have failed, on such a morning, to feel the joys of being alive and on holiday. The miles sped away, the journey lay mapped out, and I drove westward with a brave heart.

Perhaps I lunched too well, perhaps by now the roads were not quite so clearly marked either in my head or on the map I was using. Perhaps my concentration wandered after my unaccustomed extravagance of a bottle of claret. I shall never know, but suddenly I realized I was lost.

Like most people who have a very poor sense of direction, I hated to ask the way. I kept on driving, telling myself that soon I should find a name that I would recognize on a signpost and from that moment I should be all right. The name did not appear, and eight o'clock arrived to find me somewhere in the centre of Cornwall, hungry, extremely thirsty, and feeling almost as far from my cousins as I had been when in London.

I crested a hill and there ahead of me lay the sea. I drove slowly towards it, seeing its deep blue slowly turning to black as the sun began to sink behind it. Well, I comforted myself, once

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on the coast should be certain to find a road well signposted and, after a little refreshment at the local, be on a surer way than I had experienced over the last two hours.

I bumped past the few houses that constituted the village, and went on until the road petered out into a minute harbour. I got out and stretched my legs and stared round me. I had come into the village by one road and the only way out of it was to turn round and climb back over the hill. I sighed, lit a cigarette, and decided that, at last, I must seek a little help along with my refreshment.

I left the car and walked back, staring about for a pub, and suddenly found one lying back off the road, hugging itself into the green hill behind.

The wooden door was closed but it scarcely resisted my sudden push and I found myself in the parlour. There were three men huddled together all listening with rapt attention to the man behind the bar, whom I took to be the publican. As the door opened, eight eyes came round slowly and stared at me. When I approached, the three men fell back, leaning against the wall, holding their pints of beer. They stared at me.

The publican began to wipe his counter slowly and waited for me to come right up to it before saying anything. When he spoke his voice was soft and filled with a lovely West Country burr, but it held little welcome in its tone.

"Evening, zur."

"Good evening!" I said, with false heartiness. "A pint of bitter, please, and if you've anything to eat—" My words drifted across the brooding air of the place. For an unpleasant moment, I expected to be refused refreshment.

"Ah yes. Yes, of course, zur." He turned to the pump and drew me off a pint of bitter.

"Would cheese and bread—and some pickles—suit?" As he said these words he frowned and shook his head, and I knew, without turning my head, that his decision to serve me had met with strong disapproval from the silent trio behind me.

"Will you join me?" I suddenly felt I needed an ally.

"Thank you, m'dear." The phrase slipped out and with it he relaxed. "I'll take half a pint of mild—then I'll get your food."

He disappeared somewhere into the house and I drank my beer, conscious of the hasty whispered conference going on behind.

"Do any of you know where Porthpennock is?" My voice sounded harsh and unnatural. I gave a little laugh. "Truth is, I'm lost. Silly of me, really, not to have asked my way—but you know how it is." I felt the atmosphere about me grow less brooding, more cordial.

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As the publican returned with my supper, three voices, almost in chorus, said:

" 'E be lost, George."

" Wants to know how he do get to Porthpennock."

" Would you believe it, now, George, gentleman doesn't even know where he be! "

" Oh, is that so, zur? " The landlord put down my bread and cheese. " Well, now, bless my soul, well, well, well." He beamed on me.

" Yes, George, and there we were a-thinking—" began the member of the trio on the extreme right.

" Don't matter much what you were thinking now, do it, William? " the publican cut him short.

In this changed atmosphere, I finished my beer and suggested that the next round was on me.

They agreed with alacrity and gathered round me.

" Porthpennock? " asked the bearded one whose name I learnt later was Garth. " I think that be somewhere near St. Austell. Westward of here, that be."

" It's a right long walk."

This was put in by the third member of the group, who was called Sime by his confederates.

" I've a car down by the harbour," I remarked.

This brought forth four ejaculations.

" A car? "

" By the harbour! "

" He came by road, do ye hear? "

" By the harbour. He's parked it by the harbour."

" If I were you, zur," said George, " I'd bring that car back here. Mr. Briggs, that's the local constable, he's very hot on that sort of thing. Parking of cars and so on. Best to bring it up here and put it into the side by the pub."

" Better still," suggested William, " let me get it for you, zur, I were transport driver in the Army during the war. 'Twould save you getting up from your food."

Surprised by this concern, I handed him over the keys and he darted out into the gloom of the darkening night. The others sighed and then got back to directing me.

" By car, it's some long way right round by the road."

" Could he cut across over Potter's Fields, do you think? "

" No, that were ploughed up last week."

" No, it were not," averred William, who had just come in again and now handed me back my keys.

" How would you know? You'm been out fishing since last Tuesday."

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"Well," I said nervously, "perhaps there's another way round?"

"Ar, there is." George poured out some more beer for us.

An hour later, the argument still flowed back and forth, at first spurred on by beer and then by a flow of whisky, which George had found beneath his capacious counter. Suddenly it was half past ten and the men fell silent. They looked at each other anxiously, and then the eight eyes regarded me again.

"Well, zur—time to be on your way."

"But I still don't know how to get there," I protested. "I suppose you haven't a bedroom where I could sleep tonight? Then in the morning—"

Now they had withdrawn again, even George, and they were whispering among themselves, every now and again throwing me a speculative glance. Meanwhile I finished off my whisky.

"Tell me, zur, what sort of a sailor are you?" George had come back now and I noticed that the other three had ranged themselves round the room between me and the door.

The atmosphere was charged with electricity and I knew that some decision had been taken.

"I was in the Navy during the war," I replied.

"The Navy!"

"A proper sailor—now, there's a surprise!"

"That's a good one—in the Navy!"

"It's like this, zur." George leaned on the counter and dropped his voice confidentially. "I'm an innkeeper, and by rights I can't refuse you. But, in a manner of speaking, it would be most inconvenient to put you up tonight. We have a small job on this evening and there wouldn't be anyone to look after you. My wife—well, she's had to go to her daughter's—and I'm alone here."

His eyes now held mine and he pleaded, "It's not that we're really going to kidnap you, zur, but we'd sooner have you along with us than here on your own. You see, you might be tempted to tell Mr. Briggs and, well, he's only been here a few months and is a bit conscientious about things—not like old Hugh. Now, if old Hugh had still been here, why, bless you, you could have talked to him till you were blue in the face. He just closed his eyes and enjoyed his brandy."

There it was—it was out. They were smugglers. I could hardly believe my ears. As it was, I'd enjoyed enough whisky to think the whole thing a joke. I felt pretty sure there was no intention of foul play—such as dumping me overboard just because I'd walked in on them and upset their plans. So I replied, "I'll be glad to join you."

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"No tricks now," said Garth. "And even if you were a Captain in the Navy, I want it clearly understood that I'm skipper tonight." He favoured me with a scowl and added reasonably, "It's my boat."

"Agreed," I answered. "Now if we've time for another drink—"

"Rum—it must be rum now. For it'll be mighty cold out there tonight."

Several rums later, wearing a huge blue pullover lent to me by George, I made my erratic way with them towards the harbour. To my surprise we boarded a fairly large motor boat which was slowly pulled out towards the sea. I was pushed into work on the wheel, and while I steered I heard curses and groans as the heavy boat, aided by the current, slowly and silently moved away from the shore. After half an hour, they came into the cabin and we all had some more rum, then watches were consulted, the engine started, and off we set in a south-westerly direction.

George had taken the helm and the four of us in the cabin settled down to some steady drinking.

After about an hour and a half, the engines were cut and a sea-anchor put out. William went for'ard and flashed a light and waited. There was no answering light and not a sound disturbed the night. What, I wondered, would happen to me—nowadays a respectable lawyer—if a coastguard should spot us? I put the thought quickly out of my mind. I was feeling extremely muzzy by now and a wonderful sense of unreality dominated me.

After a while William came in. "It's mighty cold out there. Sime, you take the light and, bless you, keep it flashing, for they may have got the meeting-place wrong."

Then we heard it—a distant *phut-phut* of engines. Immediately all was activity and as they went on deck, George said, "You stay down below, now. Our friends would be rare put out to find a stranger here."

I could hear voices directing each other. I thought I recognized some French expletives but my eyes were getting heavier and heavier and, after a while, I gave up the struggle. Just before I dropped off to sleep I wondered vaguely if that last rum had tasted odd or if I had had just one too many.

My head felt as if it were being attacked by a pneumatic drill. Cautiously I opened my eyes to find myself under the solemn scrutiny of a young woman. I was sitting or, more accurately, half lying, across the back seat of my car. In either arm I was hugging a bottle.

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The solemn blue eyes continued to stare at me. I made an effort to sit up and tried a cautious smile. There was no response from the blue eyes at all. " Who are you? " I managed at last.

" I think it would be more to the point for me to ask you that. Until you move that car, I can't get the cows in for milking."

" Oh, I'm very sorry." I struggled into a sitting position and one of the bottles slipped onto the floor of the car. Her eyes left mine and glanced down at the bottle disapprovingly. Hastily I put the other one down.

" Could you tell me where I am, please ? "

" This place is Johnson's Farm. You are about two miles out of Porthpennock."

" Oh no," I groaned. " Then you would be Pamela Johnson ? " The hostility changed to curiosity. " I'm your Cousin Peter."

The curiosity turned to laughter. " Well, we wondered what had happened to you. Now, if you'll please move the car, you can tell us where you got to and how you happened to end up here with a couple of bottles of brandy some time in the early hours of the morning." She turned to go, then over her shoulder said, " Oh, and I'd better warn you. Last night, Daddy was woken up by a car crashing into some gate; he'll be furious when he finds out it was his gate and your car."

As I got the car out of her way, I wondered miserably how I was going to explain myself. I was equally curious to know if William, who drove lorries for the Army during the war, had gone back via Potter's Fields or whether it had been ploughed. He'd gone back by bicycle, I knew, because the wet tyre marks were still on the boot of my car.

Still, it was a nice gesture on their part to leave me a couple of bottles of liqueur brandy. They might make me less unwelcome.

* * *

*SOLUTION to SUMMER PIE on page 54*

1. *Duke, Marquis, Earl, Viscount, Baron.*
2. *From the initials G.P. in " G.P. Vehicle," meaning " General Purpose Vehicle."*
3. *a. Wine with brandy added. b. mixed drink of beer and gin. c. to drink to the last drop.*
4. *The king of diamonds.*
5. *The " Penny Blacks " issued in Great Britain in 1840.*
6. *Thirty-two, in " Swan Lake."*
7. *Tree in Scandinavian mythology, whose roots and branches bind together earth, heaven, and hell. Perfume made from the Malayan ylang-ylang tree.*

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# BE SHOT FOR SIXPENCE

## by MICHAEL GILBERT

*In cold, sickening fear, I faced this last moment of crisis. I watched the moving hand of the clock. It was only a matter of seconds before I must reply or else . . .*

*My kidnapping and this scene of threatened torture seemed a nightmare from which I must wake.*

*Dru, my interrogator, was the perfect pig-man, with his overflowing jowl, and tiny, deep-set vicious eyes that bit into mine. Relentlessly his question came again, "Is it the intention to provoke a general strike in Hungary?" It was, I now knew, the whole purpose of Ferenc Lady and his staff at Schloss Obersteinbrückl over the Austrian border to ferment this strike, it covered perhaps some secret manœuvre.*

*A whirling kaleidoscope filled my mind: Colin's face—(Colin whose disappearance on an unknown top-secret mission had led me half across Europe in search of him)—Truë, attractive as ever, leading her two great dogs—the traitor Messelen struggling in my grasp—but the courage with which I had killed Messelen had ebbed from me.*

*In a mist of terror, I screamed as the seconds ran out and Dru's relentless question came for the last time . . .*

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I FOUND myself shouting, " Yes."

" There was no hurry," sneered Colonel Dru. " You had all of ten seconds. We will start again. When is the strike to be? "

" I don't know," I said at once. " He wouldn't tell me."

Then we sat in silence as the second-hand moved through its allotted span, and I felt the sweat start out all over my body, like water from a wrung cloth.

" Five," said Dru, after what seemed an age. And then, " Ten. So, Mr. Philip, he did not tell you. A pity."

One of the telephones on the desk rang discreetly. It must have been a special line to Hungarian police headquarters, because Dru went straight to it, picked it up, and said, " Colonel Dru speaking." He placed his hand over the mouthpiece and said to his aide, Major Becker, " Take this man away. You know where to put him. I will speak to him again in the morning . . . "

The room was bare. Bare wooden floor, bare walls, a single window, a high ceiling from which swung a single light. In the middle of the floor stood the only piece of furniture, a big, old-fashioned iron bedstead, a bed of the unyielding sort, with plenty of scroll-work and four brass knobs, one at each corner. On it lay a thin and lumpy mattress and one small, tattered blanket.

" It is an apartment we keep for special guests," said Becker. " Those we are anxious to keep with us. It has every modern convenience—" he indicated the bed—" and plenty of fresh air." He walked over to the window and opened it and stared out pointedly. I walked across and looked out, too.

Eighty feet below us, lit by arc-lamps, was the courtyard. There was something else, too. For a moment I could not make it out. Then I saw. Set into the concrete surface of the yard were a number of steel spikes. They were pieces of angle-iron, which had been cut to an acute point at the top; and they were arranged in chevaux-de-frise formation immediately under my window.

" We have sometimes found our guests curiously anxious to leave us," said Becker with a smirk. " We therefore thought it best to discourage any unorthodox exit. One must admit, of course, that if you were *really* determined, the presence of our little pincushion would not prevent you from throwing yourself out. However, of the fifty or more guests we have entertained, no one has yet made the attempt."

I walked over to the bed, sat down on it, and yawned rudely.

" Quite right," said the Major, with a sneer. " Quite right. We must not keep you from your bed. The best of dreams. If you are cold, you can always run round the room. Should you need anything, just ring the bell. No one will come."

" Stop behaving like a clown," I said.

He stood for a moment, looking down at me. I thought he was going to hit me, and did not greatly care. Then he said, " Curious that you should be so truculent now. You did not seem to be truculent a short time ago, ha ha! Or was I mistaken? "

I said nothing and he went out. I heard him posting one of the

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men at the end of the corridor, and giving him some instructions.

I turned out the light, and sat down on the edge of the bed. It was there that fear got hold of me. It came with the sudden silence. It filtered in with the half light from the open window. It laid its fingers upon me and loosed my sinews. At that moment, if I had been forced to stand, I think my knees would have betrayed me.

Will-power is a tricky thing. It has unimaginable reserves and unexpected limitations. A climber has more occasion to think about it than most people, for any difficult climb is a three-cornered fight between will, body, and the rock face. By hard experience I had found out a certain amount about my own equipment. And one thing I was certain about: I could not afford to compromise. Dru had broken me once: and that meant that in future battles the odds were heavily in his favour. There were other considerations, but they were of lesser importance. It was becoming clear to me, for instance, that I had been made a fool of. Twice bitten by Lady, I had a third time proffered my hand. He had, of course, concurred in my kidnapping, so that I might be tortured into revealing the half truths that he had pumped into me.

My mind refused to contemplate just what was going to happen to me when I had been sounded by Dru and his assistants and found to be empty; or what I was likely to suffer in the process.

A cold and comfortless self-contempt had got hold of me. This was the moment of truth, which comes to a climber when he finally realizes that he can do no more. He can go neither forward nor back, up nor down. Whether he holds on or drops off is between him and his Maker. It concerns no one else in the wide world.

It was my anger with Lady that saved the day. Anger can be as warming as alcohol. And much more permanent in its effects. I sat up, quite suddenly, on that ludicrous iron bedstead, and swore that I would twist Lady's neck for what he had done to me. I had not until that moment considered my position objectively at all. But now I did two things which in retrospect seem to me significant. I kicked off my shoes and padded across to the door. The guard was sitting on a chair at the end of the passage. He looked about as mobile as the Rock of Gibraltar. Then I glanced at my watch. It was almost exactly eleven o'clock.

As an abstract problem, what I had to do did not merit any great expenditure of thought. The room I was in was built to hold. It was beyond imagination that I could make any impression on the woodwork of the walls or floor or ceiling. Certainly I could do nothing effective without attracting the instant attention of my guard. He might be resting on the base of his spine, but he wasn't as fast asleep as all that. And anyway, I had no semblance of a tool with which to cut or hack my way out.

Which left the window.

This was not guarded with shutters or bars. My captors had insolently relied on an older and stronger barrier. I suppose that a desperate man might have wrought himself up to the pitch where he would have cast himself to death on the bare stones of the

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courtyard. But I do not believe that any man born of woman would deliberately have impaled himself alive on those steel spikes that winked up so hopefully at him from the abyss.

However, since the window was the only way, it was the way I must take.

The first problem was direction. To go sideways promised little. If I managed to circle the turret I should merely find myself with my problem repeated on the sheer face of the building. To go down would need eighty feet of reliable rope. The single blanket was so old as to be virtually useless. The cover of the mattress was more hopeful. If I could succeed in tearing it quietly and plaiting it into strips, it might give me fifteen feet. Which might be enough to reach the window underneath me.

It was the beginning of an idea, and better than nothing. I went across to the window, put my legs through, let them slip down, and then, holding the sill with my right hand, I pushed myself out until my head and body were clear. A quick look down was enough. The window underneath me and the one under that were both shuttered, flush to the sills.

I pulled myself back into the room.

I was glad to notice, incidentally, that this preliminary exercise had not worried me. Not to be afraid of " exposure " is one of the first things a climber learns; and in the end a so-called " head for heights " becomes as much a part of his equipment as his crampons or rope. But like other faculties, it is one that fatigue or hunger or even the stress of emotion can easily impair.

If it was a straight choice between down and up, there was a lot to be said for going up. It was clear that the top of the turret must be above the gutter level of the roof. If, therefore, I proceeded on an upward diagonal course, I must quite quickly strike the spot where the turret joined the roof. This would avoid the difficult overhang caused by the guttering of the turret itself.

Whether or not I could venture on such a course depended almost entirely on the state of preservation of the brickwork. If it had been a new house, or even an old house with the brickwork recently repointed, it would have been hopeless from the start. I leaned out of the window again and felt with my fingernail.

It was better than I had dared to hope. The mortar between the bricks was comparatively soft and flaky. Moreover, the bricks had originally been laid with a wider band of mortar between them than you would find in English building.

I sat down again on the bed. What I proposed was feasible. It was still hideously dangerous.

My plan was to make an ascent, by the use of pitons, or metal pegs, of the diagonal stretch of fifteen feet or so of brick wall that separated my window from the point where the swell of the turret touched the eaves of the main building.

I should need a minimum of seven pegs, each at least ten inches long, strong enough to bear my weight. The ideal would be a standard alpine ice-piton with a serrated point and a flattened end—

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an ideal for which I might whistle. In addition, I wanted a mallet, heavy enough to drive the pegs but soft enough not to wake the guard who was now snoring uneasily on his hard perch.

I turned my attention to the bed. The foot was formed of a single cross-bar of cast iron, too thick to break, and too long to be of any use. The head was more promising, and I examined it closely. It was made in three parts. A centre part of four uprights—fifteen inches long, I judged—flanked on either side by a shorter section of four uprights each rather less than a foot long. Hand me a metal saw, remove the guard, and a quarter of an hour's work would have given me twelve useful pegs.

The centre part seemed to me the most hopeful. It had a double rail at the top. Now if I could lay my hands on a straight, heavy lever, I could insert it between the two bars and, using the lower one as a fulcrum, could certainly shift the top one. Once the heads were free I could bend those four iron bars out of their sockets at the bottom. The bending, if judiciously performed, would leave each bar with the sort of chisel edge I needed.

If I had a lever. Any piece of metal, a foot or more long, an inch or two inches thick, and stout enough not to break or bend under pressure. I kicked my heels at this obstacle for half an hour before I realized that the answer was staring me in the face.

I got up and walked across to the window. It was a perfectly ordinary English-type sash-window, made in two halves, either of which ran up and down on cords in its own wooden slot. And at the end of each cord must hang, I knew although I could not see it, exactly the lever I needed: the counterweight of the window.

I fingered the woodwork. It was oldish and needed paint, but it was still quite sound. A chisel, a screwdriver, even a pocket-knife would have been enough to open it. If I had a pocket-knife.

At this point the guard showed signs of life, and I sank back as quietly as I could on my bed. When he had had a look at me and lumbered back to his seat and grumbled and belched a couple of times and resettled himself, I looked again at my watch. Half past twelve. Surely I could find the tiny piece of metal necessary to unlock this ultimate door. The whole bed was made of metal. The base of it was jointed diamonds of thick metal wire. A single one of those would do the trick.

I turned back the mattress. If I could bend back the tip of one of them, I could soon work it loose. It was too strong for my bare fingers. I needed another piece of metal to start it with. Anything would do. A large coin. A half-crown. Even a penny. If I had a penny. I examined the bed once more. It occurred to me that something might be done with the brass knobs. These were usually made to unscrew, and had a thin, hollow, threaded shank, which would give me the edge I wanted.

The first one I tried was stiff, but I could tell that it was made to move. I exerted pressure, and started it. Quietly, quietly. I dared not hurry for fear of making a noise. At last the knob was clear. I shook it, and a folded spill of paper fell onto the floor.

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With fingers that hardly seemed to belong to me, I unfolded the paper. Then I carried it across to the window and spread it clumsily out on the sill. It started without preamble.

*I wonder if you will catch up? You are such a devilish determined person that I believe you will. A slow starter, Philip, but I've never known anything in this world to stop you when once you get going. As you will gather, I'm writing this as my last will and testament. This is the end of the road. I'm afraid I know something that Dru will stop at nothing to extract, and I have not got enough confidence in my powers of detachment to face him again. Luckily I am equipped to deal with this situation.*

They must have found the cyanide capsule *after* Colin had used it. That, of course, was why they had examined my teeth so carefully.

*It's quite possible that this will all be old news to you. It may already have reached you by another route. More by luck than judgment I managed to tip the wink to one of Schneidermeister's boys. He was on hand when they unloaded me from the boat. He couldn't help me, but the word should get back through their frontier networks. I doubt it can be in time to do me any good, but I hope it may stop someone else dropping down the same hole.*

*The main thing, as you have probably guessed, is to deal with Truë. You realize that she was selling us all up the river? I confess it came as a complete shock to me, but I am not sure that I feel able to judge her. Her father and mother—did she tell you they were dead?—are very much alive, and stand surety to her masters for her good behaviour.*

Yes, I think I had guessed. She had sold her body to me so coldly that it could not have been for other than adequate consideration.

*Nothing more to say, Philip, and this pen is running out.* Then a scrawl which might have been *Good-bye* or *Good night*

I refolded the paper very carefully and put it into my pocket. Then I picked up the brass knob, inserted its hollow edge behind the wire of the bed-spring, and twisted until the wire came loose; bent open the wire, and drew it out. Then I went across to the window, fiddled the end of the wire behind the wooden slat, and worked the slat out far enough to get a finger under it. It was only a question of time and patience before I loosened the wood enough to lift it out. It was held by two short nails, and was, I fancy, left like that for convenience when a sash-cord needed mending.

On reflection, I decided, at the cost of a little extra time and labour, to take out both sides and remove the bottom window bodily. As long as I was fiddling with one side only I was in deadly danger of making some noise that would bring my guard out of his uneasy dreams of beer and sauerkraut.

When I had got both the side slats out, I raised the bottom window as high as it would go, thus lowering the counterweights until they rested on the sill. Then I untied the cords and, holding them in one hand, lowered the window again until the cords ran out of the pulleys at the top. Then I lifted the whole window clear and

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stood it against the wall behind the door. Even if my guard happened to look at the window, I did not think it would have been easy for him to see that one half was gone entirely

Then I lifted out the left-hand sash-weight. It was a trifle shorter than I had hoped, a fat, cylindrical pig of lead with a loop at the top for the cord. Before using it, I swathed it carefully with a long strip off my blanket and then inserted the tip between the two top rails of the centre piece of the bed back and pressed downward. Both bars bent, but neither gave way entirely.

I moved my lever up to one end and tried again. Flushed with success, I forgot all caution. There was an appallingly loud crack.

I held my breath.

It had sounded to me like a gun going off. The guard stirred sharply on his seat, said something, moved again I dared not budge. The guard let his breath out in a strangled grunt; then in again; then out again. with a suspicion of a snore.

I gave him a full five minutes to get back into dreamland before I moved. Then I found that the results exceeded my expectations The bottom of the two cross-bars had broken clean away. The top one was so far bent up that I could draw out all four of the uprights. The middle ones came easily. The two end ones needed more work, but they came finally. I simply took their tops and bent them, one by one, out of their sockets.

I suppose I assumed that, having got so far, the other bars would somehow come too. I was wrong. The side portions were independent of the centre and, since they had only one cross-bar, I was unable to get any purchase for my home-made lever. I tried desperately to bend the bars separately, but they were beyond my strength. When the sweat ran cold down my face, and I found my fingers trembling with the effort I had wasted, I pulled myself up It was maddening to be so near and yet so far. Four pegs for fifteen feet. An acrobatic monkey might have made it Not me. I should need at least seven—preferably nine.

And then I remembered old Rannecker's account of how he had got himself single-handed out of a crevasse on the Costa Brava. Captive pitons! Could I do it? *Dared I do it?* Using proper equipment, with rings at the piton ends and nylon rope, it was perilous enough. Rannecker did it to save his life, and it was the last time he ever climbed alone. But he had covered sixty feet, shifting his pitons *twelve* times. I had to go fifteen feet and should have to make, perhaps, only three independent moves.

The sweat stood out on me again as I thought of it. A climb with pitons is a thing outside the experience of the ordinary mountaineer —in this country. The placing of an isolated peg might be tolerated in an emergency; that is all. Nevertheless, it *is* quite possible to make a straight climb up a sheer face, using pegs all the way. You make it in exactly the same way as a climb with an ice-axe. First, you cut grips for right hand and right foot; then, using the grips you have cut, fashion further grips, higher up, for left hand and left foot; and so on, while strength and nerve last. When

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working with pitons the same process is employed, a peg being driven instead of a slot being cut. The effort is the same. The difficulty is simply that you must carry with you sufficient pegs for the whole journey.

And that was where Rannecker's ingenuity came in. He had only four pegs, and he had sixty feet to cover. Therefore he attached a length of cord to each peg, and dragged the pegs he stood on with him as he went—*using the same pegs over and over again*. But he was using mountaineering-gear. Not soft iron rods broken from a bedstead and lengths of rotten sash-cord.

I took another look at my watch, and thought for a moment that my eyes were playing tricks. It was already nearly a quarter to four. If I was going to make the effort I had about an hour in hand. Between half past four and five would be the ideal time. There would be just enough light to see what I was doing. And perhaps even a kind early-morning mist to seal the eyes of any watchers on the ground.

First I must bend the ends of two of my bars far enough round to take a cord without slipping. This was difficult, but not impossible. I pushed each bar in turn back into the slot and bent it as far as I dared. Then I tore the sash-cords out of their grooves in the side of the window, jerking the nails out carefully, one by one. I had thought that I should need to cut them, but it now occurred to me that I only needed to rope the bottom two pitons.

The next question was whether I climbed with shoes or without. There were dangers both ways. The danger of slipping if I kept them on; of bruising and of cramp if I dispensed with them.

In the end I decided on a compromise. I took out the thick cork undersole from each shoe and put it inside my woollen sock. This gave me a grip and afforded a degree of protection. Incidentally, it also solved the question of the mallet. A heavy shoe, the heel muffled in several thicknesses of blanket, was as good a hammer as I could have devised. I was well aware that if once I stopped to think I should never go. So I gave myself no chances.

I put the spare shoe into my trouser pocket, tied the ends of the two cords to my wrists, took my home-made pitons in one hand and my shoe in the other, and stepped out onto the window-sill.

The first moves were easy. All I had to do was to stop thinking about the drop underneath me.

I hammered one peg in at waist height, a couple of feet to the right of the window. It went in easily, but felt nice and firm, nevertheless. The peg was about twelve inches long, and I buried nine inches before I stopped hitting it. The hammering didn't sound too loud, but the blanket covering wasn't going to last.

Standing on tiptoe, I then put in the second peg as high as I could above the first. This would have to be done one-handed and I found that the best way was to work the point in for an inch or two, then leave the peg, feel for the shoe which, when not in use, lay inside the front of my shirt, reach up, and hammer the

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peg home. You will understand that as I was standing on the window-sill there was, at the moment, no necessity for such fancy work, but I thought it better to get the drill right while I was in a position to experiment.

Then I stood for a moment, mapping out the route. The strength of any climb lies in knowing exactly what you are going to do. One of the additional difficulties here was that the breast of the turret made it impossible to see the exact point I was aiming for: the junction with the main wall at gutter level. I deduced it must exist because I could, of course, see the main wall, and could judge where the join must come.

I reckoned that I had to make a sideways movement of perhaps twelve feet and an upwards climb of a little more. Allowing that my reach was six feet, I had the best part of eight or nine feet to cover before I could scramble onto my objective.

Nine feet up; a little less than nine feet across. In other words, once I was straddled, I had to move all four pegs three times each. That was the sum total. Provided my strength held out, and I didn't get cramp and didn't lose my head or my foothold, or arouse the guard by my knocking or the attention of anyone else by my manœuvres. The last was the least of the dangers. Being above the arc-lights, I was in shadow. And an observer, looking up, had the light to contend with.

Thinking was not going to cure any of my other problems.

I put my right foot on one peg, took hold of the other with my right hand, and pulled myself up. I balanced for a moment, to get the feel of it. The piton was too thin, and bit into my foot through the cork sole. Nevertheless, it felt firm. If they all went as well as that, I could do it.

Using my left hand, I drove in my two other pegs, one at waist height, the other above my head. Then I transferred my weight to my left foot and, steadying myself with my left hand, stepped up.

Now for the pay-off. I gripped the cord firmly in my right hand, bent down as far as I dared, and pulled. The peg slewed towards me and stuck. I gave a little jerk in the opposite direction, like an awkward angler casting against the stream. Then back again. Once, twice, three times, and it was out.

Mixed with my triumph was a much colder feeling. I was under no misapprehension as to what I had done. The way back was now sealed. I could pull the peg out by its cord all right but no contortion I could devise would get me into a position to hammer it back again.

I could only go up. Sideways and upwards.

The first two moves went with suspicious smoothness. I realized that the actual physical effort was not going to be the limiting factor; not at that point, anyway. Accidents apart, it seemed that it would be a question of whether I could reach the roof before I was crippled by cramp in my legs, or the soft but repeated hammering brought my guard running into the room.

It was the next move that started the trouble. I found the

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greatest difficulty in getting the peg in at all. I was well balanced on my left foot, and was using my right hand for hammering so there ought to have been no difficulty. It occurred to me that I might have chosen an unlucky place. With great caution I pulled the peg clear, and tried again, one brick lower. It was a little better, but not much. It took a deal of uncomfortably noisy hammering to get the peg home. In the end it was done; and I shifted my position for the third time.

At this point all my doubts became certainties. For some reason, as I got higher, the mortar was getting harder. Possibly it was because I was now coming under the area sheltered by the overhang of the roof, and the wall face had suffered less from the weather.

This time I had to use my hammer left-handed. The results were not encouraging. The foot peg went in to about half its length, and there it stuck. The more I hit it the looser it became. The peg for my hand went in less than that.

I had cut my slender margin of safety in half.

Stop for a minute, and think it out. This was the moment at which, in any normal climb, I should have turned back. But I could not turn back. I could only go on. I must accept a non-existent margin of safety because I had no choice. But there was another reason too—a purely psychological one. I could now see my goal. My progress had brought me far enough round the curve of the turret to see the point at which I was aiming.

Above my head and about five feet to my right was the point where the main guttering touched the circumference of the turret. And to make the sight even more tempting, there was a down drainage pipe in the angle of the wall. If I had been thinking properly I should have deduced that there must be.

If only I could now have gone *downwards* and sideways all would have been well, for I could have descended, crabwise, into an area of softer mortar until I reached the drain-pipe, and then climbed up it onto the roof. But by no power on earth could I descend. By no contortion could I drive in a piton at lower than knee level.

It was maddening to realize how near I had come to success. My calculations seemed crazy, yet in the event they had proved absolutely correct. But for the successive hardening of the mortar, I should only have had to make two more, comparatively easy steps and I should have been safe on that roof. Fear is a bad counsellor to a climber; but anger may be a worse. I gave each of those shaky pegs a final tap for luck, gripped the top one, and stepped onto the lower.

Almost at once the lower peg started to bend under my weight. I increased the grip of my hand. Previously I had been using the upper peg lightly to maintain balance. Now I was actually suspended from it. Which introduced a final, limiting factor: the length of time I could support myself by the strength of one hand, for my foothold was sloped out to such a degree that it was almost useless. With a cold feeling of desperation, I pulled out the free hand peg, moved it across and up as far as I dared, and drove it in.

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By the mercy of God, I had struck a moderate patch and it went in a certain way.

The lifting and driving of the bottom peg was the hardest work I have ever tried in my life. My left foot had now almost no grip at all and my left wrist was weakening dangerously. Again I struck a fair patch, and it was this alone that saved me. Six blows brought the peg home.

I pulled on my left wrist, got my toe onto the right peg, lifted, got my new handhold, and in that instant, lost my left peg.

How it happened I have no clear idea. I had been almost hanging on it, and I can only think that the sudden removal of my weight jerked it. It slipped from my fingers, and I heard the pretty tinkle as it landed on the courtyard.

In my mind's eye, I fell with the peg; turning over and over in the air. All my calculations had been false. I had thought I was far enough over to avoid the spikes. I must have been wrong, for one of the spikes went right through me. It was curious that I felt no pain. . . .

At what interval of time after this I do not know, but a matter of seconds only, I guess, my head cleared, and I found that I was staring stupidly at my left hand. I was still standing, with my right foot firmly on its peg and my right hand holding fast. But there was something wrong with my left wrist. The cord had gone. In grabbing at the hand peg, the loop over my wrist must have slipped.

Quite slowly I looked down. The foot peg was still in the wall. The cord was trailing from it. And it was as effectively out of my reach as the hand peg which had just fallen eighty feet into the courtyard. I was stranded, balanced on one shaky spike, holding on to another, and three feet from my goal.

How long it took me to work out the last step I have no idea. Time had ceased to have much meaning.

Then I saw the solution. The first thing was to change hands and feet. The hand was easy enough. The foot was another matter; but I did it with a sort of awkward shuffle. I was beyond caring for finesse. Then, taking as firm a grip as I could with my left hand, I threw myself across to the right hand and right foot together. My fingers scrabbled for a moment, then found the top of the pipe.

Seconds later I was on the roof. I threw myself forward, flat, my right cheek against the dew-wet slates, and lay for five minutes without stirring, savouring what it was like to be alive again.

It was the sound of a car that stirred me. It was coming along the main road at the foot of the wooded knoll on which my prison house stood. I could see the headlights, but they were dimmed by the light of morning, which was coming up with strides.

In ten minutes the sun would be up. I must move. And I must face the next decision, which was likely to be a difficult one.

The house was built in a hollow square round a central courtyard, with a turret at each corner joined by a long stretch of

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shallow-pitched, slated roof. Moving along the roof presented no difficulty. Feeling myself a little conspicuous on the outer perimeter, I clambered, flat-footed, up the ridge of the two roofs behind my turret and slid down the gully on the inner side. All my movements were slow and heavy. I was suffering from the most desperate reaction and was, besides, physically finished.

On the inner lip of the roof, overlooking the courtyard, I found a lead-lined cat-walk which served as a gutter or as a footway, I supposed, for workmen on the roof. I saw that by keeping to it I could make a complete tour of the building. It was broken by the dormers of half a dozen windows in each side of the square, but these were shallow affairs which I could scramble over as I came to them.

I was now out of sight of anyone on the ground, and I sat down to try and think. As I sat, the sun came over the horizon in the pink glory that means wet weather, and sounds of returning life came clearly to my ears, funnelled up to me from the inner court below. A door slammed. A tin pail was clanked down.

The moment for decision had come.

Having got so far, I wanted to get farther still. I wanted to get clear of that hellish building and out into the kindly countryside.

I broke open the nearest window. No finesse was required here. I used the heel of my shoe to break the glass, and thrust my hand through and slipped the catch. I was in an empty attic. The door opened onto a corridor. I left that door open. Then I went back to the window and climbed out onto the leadwork again.

From this point I took care to leave no trace of my progress. I moved carefully and slowly until I had made my way round two complete sides of the square. I peered into each dormer window in turn.

The first two rooms were empty. The third, which seemed to be some sort of store-room, was more hopeful. I slipped the end of my faithful piton under the catch and eased it open; stepped in, and closed and latched the window behind me.

The jumble of stuff almost filled the room. There were dusty hangings, roughly folded and piled together. I burrowed carefully in behind them. My bed was dusty and cramped, but I could have slept on spikes.

When I came round again I had a throat like a kiln and a nagging headache; and my arms and legs felt as if they had been on the rack. Also, in spite of the warmth in my dusty coffin, I was shivering. I extricated myself and moved cautiously over to the window.

It was nearly eight o'clock. I had been out of the world for thirteen hours.

An arc-light came on in the courtyard and I shrank back from the window. But it was not aimed at me. It was directed downwards. Something was happening in the courtyard, and since anything that went on could be my concern, I craned to look.

Four men had marched out. They were in the uniforms of the Hunting Police—and they carried rifles. Then two more

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ppeared. They had someone by the arms. Someone in shirt-leeves and open neck. Someone I thought I recognized.

A chair was fetched, and the shirtsleeved man slumped in it. ıs he was being tied to it, I recognized him. It was my sentry of ıe night before.

Four rifles sounded together. The man in the chair jumped as hot needles had been stuck into him, strained for a minute, and ıen sagged into a parody of sleep. He had been a great sleeper.

The men filed off. The lights went out. That scene was over. waited.

I must then have gone to sleep again, sitting, for the next thing I ;member is looking at my watch and seeing that the time was leven o'clock.

Almost exactly forty-eight hours ago I had said to Truë, " What o I do now? " and the little witch had said to me, " Just walk out f the exit and take a look at the booths." Oh, the sweet child.

I creaked to my feet, an old, old man, and walked across to the oor, and opened it. Everything was quiet up on the top storey, ut there was plenty of life below. I turned up the collar of my ›at and buttoned it across to hide my shirt. And I wound the ›rd round one end of faithful old peg to form a grip. Piton, mmy, and now life-preserver. A versatile piece of iron.

I went on up to the floor above and eased open the door of the ›om above the one I had just visited. This one was empty and oked unused. I opened the window. And there was the hoped-›r down-pipe. It looked stout, and had thoughtfully been set vay from the wall so that I could get my fingers round it. Just hat the burglar ordered. I took off my shoes and dropped them ›wn the front of my shirt, swung out, and started down the pipe.

A minute later I was sitting on the ground putting my shoes on. The south was the deserted side of the building. Ahead of me as a slope, thickly covered with trees and bushes, a line of lights, ıd freedom.

There was plenty of time, and I moved forward with great ution. One thing I had in mind was the possibility of trip-ires; but if any were there, luck took me past them. Ten minutes ought me to the lights. They were a line of overhead electric hts on standards, of the sort used in prison camps.

There was also, as I saw by the light of the lamps, a very formid-le fence. This was prison-camp standard, too. First a fence of ıgle strands, taut and close together and topped by an additional ction bent back at such a sharp reverse angle as to make climbing nost impossible. Behind that a second similar fence with the › leaning the other way. In between them, bundles and rolls d sheaves of loose barbed wire.

I sat in a coreopsis and contemplated it sourly.

I was conscious of anger and frustration. To have got so far and en to be held up. It was the feeling I had had as I stood poised, llet-like on one toe, eighty feet above Dru's pincushion. I ınted to attack that fence with my bare hands. Before I could

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do anything silly, I heard the guard coming, and retreated fas
He was a young man, and looked alert. There's nothing lik
shooting a sentry from time to time to keep people on their toes.

He came slowly past, his eyes on the fence. The moment hun
stretched, broke. Then he passed on.

Keeping under cover, I made my way round towards the north
west corner. It was here that most of the activity seemed to b
centred. A gravelled drive ran up to a paved courtyard. Ther
were two cars standing in the courtyard, and I looked at ther
covetously; but the doors and windows were all shut and I sus
pected that they were locked. Also, there were ten yards of lighte
courtyard to cross, right under the eye of the main entrance.

As I watched, a third car drove up. The driver seemed to hav
a grudge against his gear-box, and was in a hurry, or a bad tempe
or both. In fact, there was an air of activity and urgency about th
whole place: lights on in most of the ground-floor rooms, an
people coming and going inside the building.

Look at this! He hasn't locked his car. He hasn't even r
moved the ignition key. In too much of a hurry. *And* he's parke
it on my side of the courtyard. *And* I could turn it in one straigl
sweep, without backing.

The thought was no sooner in my head than I was in the drivin
seat. The engine was still warm. Switch on. One touch of th
starter, slam her into gear, and get going.

The guard on the inner courtyard was just shutting the gat
He's seen me come in, in a hurry, a minute before. Now he
going to see me going out again. He just got the gate open aga
in time, and I caught a glimpse of him in my driving-mirro
standing under the light, staring after me, his mouth open.

I was on a short, steep, gravelled driveway, with a twist in
Ahead of me, at the bottom of the hill, hidden for the moment b
the bend, was another line of lights. And, no doubt, another gat

Suppose it was shut? Drive straight through it, boy. H
anything hard enough and it'll go down.

I swung round the bend. The gate was not shut. On the co
tary, it had just been opened to admit another car, which w
half filling the open space. In the other half was standing Colon
Dru. He had got out of his car to talk to the guard.

I aimed at him with great precision; he spoilt things a little b
moving at the last moment, so that it was only my left headlam
that hit him, and the left front wheel that went over him.

The great car rose for a moment, like a tug on the crest of
oily wave, then came to earth again with a jerk, all four whee
scuttering in the dust as we went on our way.

Hit anything hard enough, and down it goes.

As I bowled down that road between the pine trees, the darkne
on either side of my headlamps expanding and contracting in
alarming manner, I tried to marshal my thoughts. It wasn't eas
The fact is I was overdriven. I had eaten nothing for more th

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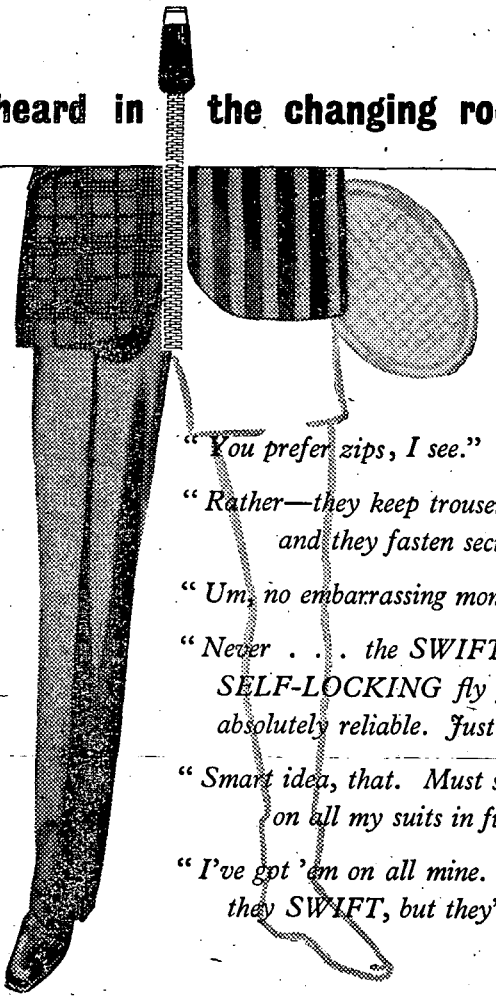
## overheard in the changing rooms



*"You prefer zips, I see."*

*"Rather—they keep trousers in good shape and they fasten securely."*

*"Um, no embarrassing moments, eh?"*

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*"Smart idea, that. Must see that they're on all my suits in future."*

*"I've got 'em on all mine. Not only are they SWIFT, but they're sure!"*

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thirty-six hours, and was already in the sharp grip of fever. had the stars to steer by. The Austrian-Yugoslav frontier lin lay to the south-west, and I had a very limited time to make th most of the enormous slice of fortune that had dropped into my lap.

Expressions such as "Sealing all exits" and "Warning a posts" flashed into my mind and I tried to consider them dis passionately. How quickly, in fact, could road blocks be set u around a given area? First of all they would have to pick up wha was left of Colonel Dru; then the guards would have to telephon their headquarters; and a plan would have to be made; an instructions sent out. It was not as if they were expecting any thing of the sort to happen.

I decided that I still had at least half an hour in hand. Probabl more. I looked at my watch. Say I had been going for twent minutes. I then glanced casually at the speedometer and notice that it registered ninety. Kilometres, not miles, but it was a lot to fast for a blindish road at night, and I eased my foot on th accelerator.

The frontier would lie between ten and twenty miles awa Clearly I couldn't drive right up to it. But with any luck I coul break the back of the journey.

Twenty minutes in hand.

Scattered lights ahead. A village. No, a town. Steady, boy

It was while I was worrying about this that the petrol gave ou The car gave a warning cough. I looked at the gauge, and th next minute there I was, coasting slowly down the road, wit nothing behind me but the power of my own momentum. Luckil we were on a gentle down slope. On my left I saw an open drivewa swung across the crown of the road, and put the car in.

It was only after I had been walking for some fifteen minute that I realized just how shaky my legs were. I found that wha I was in was a short cut or back entrance to a square stone buildin

I crawled closer and read, *Josef Radk: Importer of and Deal in Fine Wines* and in smaller letters, underneath, was somethin which brought the blood to my face: *Agency Schneidermeiste*

It was an outside chance, but any chance was better than th certainty of discovery. I scrambled up and shambled across th open space in front of the house. The front door was open, and fell through it.

Sitting on a high stool, at a desk littered with papers, a cup c coffee in one hand and a pen in the other, was a man. He looke up quickly as I came in, put down his cup, and said, "You loc as if you have come far and fast."

I had an impression of a square white face and of steel-rimme glasses, behind which lived a pair of watchful eyes. His manne was reserved, but I noticed that he did not seem unduly surprise or alarmed by my irruption into his counting-house.

"Yes," I said. "I have come far and fast. Not that I a unused to travelling. A recent journey with young Fran Schneidermeister—"

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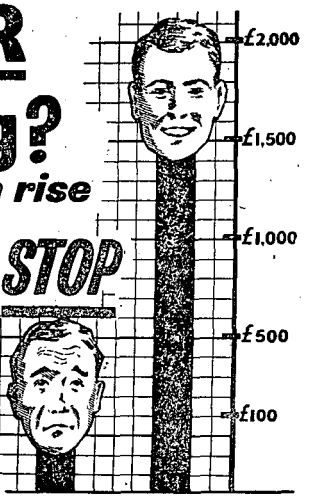


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"Ah yes," he said. "You know Franz. Might I suggest that you sit?" He pushed a chair quickly under me and I folded into it. Waves of fatigue were billowing up round me like smoke clouds, and the fever was playing tricks with my eyes . . .

My next clear memories are of the pinpoint flashes from a torch, coming and going between long ages of blackness; blackness in which my mind wandered free. Then there was the taste of soup, which I drank from time to time; and over all, pervading the darkness, assaulting my eyes and ears and nose until it became so much part of the background that I came to accept it, the sour smell of the lees of wine.

One troubled night my fever left me, and some time after that I woke to full consciousness. I was lying on a pallet bed, swathed in a cocoon of blankets. The floor under me was packed earth, and the wall, a few inches from my left side, was brick.

The steel spectacles of Radk gleamed at me, and his voice from the darkness said, "Lie still, we are moving you to more comfortable quarters." Hands lifted both ends of my pallet bed.

"I expect I can walk," I said.

"I doubt it," said Radk. "In any event it will be quicker to carry you." It wasn't a private suite at the Dorchester, but it was a nice, clean little room in the attic, and there, that evening, Radk came to talk to me.

"We have been able to bring you out," he said, "because the search has passed on. The police have been here twice in the last

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five days. Not to ransack us, you understand, but on routine searches. The strength of the ripples, out here on the circumference, suggests that you must have dropped quite a large stone into the centre of the pool." And he looked at me owlishly through his glasses.

"Five days," I said. "How long have I been here altogether?"

"Today is the seventh day."

"How soon can I move?"

"It was only, I think, the fever of exhaustion. You should recover now quite quickly. If you get about and use your legs a little tomorrow and more on the following day, you should be strong enough to make the frontier on the third day. It is only five miles. Have you reason for haste?"

"I was thinking of you," I said lamely. "I don't want to get you into trouble now." But I lied. It was the hellish country that I was in a fret to be clear of.

"As I was about to say, there should be no difficulty in reaching the frontier. Whether you could cross it at this moment—" He shook his head.

"Is it so difficult?"

"Normally, of course not. But now! I forgot that you had been out of the world for so long."

He went away, and came back with a handful of newspapers. There was a good deal in them that I found interesting. The first item that caught my eye was an account of the funeral of Colonel Allesandro Dru. It appeared that he had died in a motor accident. Swerving to avoid a child, his car had left the road and struck a telegraph post. Szormeny had attended the funeral in person.

But this was small beer. It was the happenings on the political front page that took the eye. At first, the references were guarded. Labour unrest had occurred in isolated centres due to dissatisfaction over differentials. Heavy industry and transportation were chiefly affected. The police had made a number of arrests of agitators, and the situation was in hand.

The headlines grew thicker as the storm gathered.

Two days before, the words *General Strike* were first mentioned, and prominence was given to a pronouncement by Szormeny.

"*I shall not disguise from you*," he said, in black type, "*that the situation is grave*. But it is by no means desperate, and if all do their duty, this latest attempt to throttle our economy and disrupt our régime will fail, as earlier attempts have failed. I myself have taken personal charge, during the crisis, of the essential supplies: coal, electricity, and water undertakings; and of all goods and passenger transport. There is not the least cause for alarm. Hoarding will be punished. My message to you all is: *Defeat this attempt by continuing to live your normal lives.*"

A very small item caught my eye. It said: "Madame Szormeny, with her two children, has moved from her home in the Eastern Provinces to be near her husband, who is at his post of action in the west."

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Radk came in at this moment, and I said, "How much have the papers got?"

"About half the truth," he said. "It started slowly, but yesterday, at Kaposvar, men were ordered to take out certain trains and refused. The leaders were shot. That stiffened the resistance."

"Can it succeed?"

"Of course it cannot succeed." He sounded cross. "There is a division of infantry in Kaposvar already. If necessary they will add tanks, guns, aeroplanes. How can it succeed?"

"Perhaps it has succeeded already. The fact that the authorities have not been able to conceal it from their own people and from Western observers. I should call that a victory."

"Oh certainly," said Radk. "Certainly." He added, "A friend of yours reached Pecs yesterday."

"A friend? Do you mean Lady?"

"The same. He has his courage, that one."

Of a sudden I felt a fever to be gone.

"The frontier was never more difficult," said Radk gloomily. "You will need your legs and your arms, and your wits. You should sleep now."

That evening Radk took me by back ways, after dark, to the place he had indicated on the map. There was a quarter moon, and the night was clear and still, a fact which both helped and hindered. The first part of the journey I took easily, using a little compass Radk had given me, and counting my paces as a rough check on distance.

By midnight I was comfortably settled in a thicket of broom overlooking the Valley of Twists and Turns. As Radk had warned me, it was an eerie place. The moonlight picked out the thread of white sand at the valley bottom, so that it was hard to realize that it was not a river. I gave myself a full hour, and I neither heard nor saw any sign of a human being.

I found this more than a little disturbing. The shining silver ribbon ahead of me was the actual frontier; not the geographical line, but the one on which authority had put its veto and set its watch. And I have never yet met a frontier guard who could hold himself still for an hour. My plans were upset. I had foreseen myself locating the post on either side of me, timing movements of the watchers, and slipping between them. But here was an unexplained gap. After tormenting myself with possibilities for a further ten minutes, I moved forward again. The lie of the rocks was forcing me into a used track. I felt like a mouse, treading the first mazes of some elaborate, mechanical trap.

From rock to rock, from shadow to shadow. With painful slowness, I reached the bottom of the ravine. Sooner or later, now, I must come out into the open. As I gathered myself for the dash, I noticed, on the track beside me, and more clearly on the sand ahead of me, a confused trail of footsteps.

A number of other people, perhaps five or six of them, had passed that way, and recently. If it was a patrol it was a very odd one,

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for at least one of the shoe-prints had been made by a woman.

Before I had done thinking about it, I was across and going fast up the other side of the valley. Not a shout, not a shot. After a short rest, I went on, regulating my pace to conserve my strength.

More than once, in the next two hours, I had a feeling there were people moving at a distance from me, but going in my direction. Once I thought I heard the sharp clink of iron on stone and could hardly tell whether it came from behind me or in front.

I felt no fears of the railway tunnel. It was the easiest part of the journey.

As I came out at the other side and plunged down the hill, dawn was coming up.

By my watch it was six o'clock when I reached the track, and ten more minutes brought me to the walls of Obersteinbrückl. The main gate was wide open, but there was no sound of anyone stirring. All asleep, or all gone? I pushed up the cobbled ramp into the courtyard.

Standing in the front doorway, his hands in the pockets of his old Service greatcoat, was Major Piper, H. M. Consular Agent.

When he saw me, the Major blinked twice, which I took to be a sign of grave emotion. "Glad to see you," he said. "I had some news three days ago that suggested you might be back with us soon."

"Where's Lady?"

"We last heard of him at Pecs. He had a good day on Tuesday.

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The men derailed two engines across the track, and no traffic got in or out. It can't last, of course."

"Will he ever get out?"

"It's a difficult question to answer. To my mind a strike's an easier thing to start than it is to stop. As long as there's any life in it Lady won't run away. That's my guess. The trouble is his staff, or, at least, Gheorge and Lisa insisted on going with him."

"And General Milo?"

"He's returned to The Hague. He's in charge of the Section."

The question had to be asked some time. "What about Truë?"

"Truë?" said the Major. He seemed to be speaking of someone in the remote past. "Oh, Miss Kethely. Yes. I fancy they cleaned up before they left."

His eye wandered towards the green wood that carpeted the slope behind the castle; and I knew then that in some hidden glade, the busy ants and the wood-lice were making their last bargains with her beautiful, often-sold body.

"They had to put the dogs down. They got out of hand after she had gone. They were very attached to her, you know."

"They weren't the only ones," I said.

The Major seemed disinclined to dwell on the subject. "I suppose you had quite an easy passage last night?" he said.

"Surprisingly so," I said. "It made me very suspicious. It was a lot too good to be true."

"You didn't know?"

"Didn't know what?"

For a moment the Major looked at me as if he hardly believed in me. Then the leathery face folded up into a grin and the little duck's eyes positively twinkled. "You must have been a bit hot under the collar at times," he said. "Fancy having the Hungarian Police giving you their special number-one treatment to find out something you'd never been told about."

"Quite so," I said stiffly. "Well, now I think I'll see if my bed's still made up."

"Don't be stuffy," said the Major. "And I'm afraid you can't go to bed yet. There's a job to be done." He pottered off down the hall. I thought for a moment of standing on my dignity, but he never looked round, and after a moment I followed him.

We went into the operations room. A tall man was sitting in the chair beside Lady's empty desk. There were other people at the back of the room, too, but for the moment I had no eyes for them. I was staring at the man.

I thought for a wild moment that it was Colin.

He was the same build and had the same pleasant, knobbly face. But as soon as he turned to the light I saw that it was a stranger. All the same, I had seen that face before.

"David Szormeny," said the Major. "Head of the Hungarian State."

"Former head," said Szormeny. "We can, I think, say that with safety now. Former head."

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I listened, fascinated. It was the same molasses-and-sour-cream voice that I had heard on the wireless, but a shade more human at first hand.

"If you will allow me, sir. This is the gentleman I spoke of, who will act as courier to you and your family until you reach England."

He introduced me, and now, for the first time, I took in the other people in the room. One was Madame Szormeny, a little fair-haired woman, half her husband's size but with a very friendly smile. And two good-looking children, a girl of about fourteen and a boy of twelve. They were both wearing mountaineering-kit.

"You too came over last night?" asked Szormeny.

"Yes, sir," I said. "I'm afraid I had the advantage of your preparations. It was quite unintentional."

"I was able to give certain orders at the frontier that proved helpful," agreed Szormeny.

"If I might suggest it, sir," said Major Piper, "you have an early start this afternoon. Your host and hostess, the Baron and Baronin Milo, would wish to receive you. And then, to bed."

He fairly shooed everyone out of the room, but a glint out of the corner of his eye told me to wait. I sat on the edge of a chair, half of me concentrating on keeping awake and the other half trying to sort things out.

It was nearly an hour before the Major came back. He seemed pleased with himself. "Well," he said.

"Well?"

"You knew nothing of it?"

"Nothing at all."

"It was a well-kept secret." He said it unboastfully.

"Do you mean to say that the whole business was designed to get David Szormeny out of his country and over to the west?"

"Yes."

"The strike and all?"

"The strike was our cover plan, yes. It served both purposes. To keep their minds off our real plan, and to enable certain steps to be taken."

I remembered what I had read. "You mean that Szormeny was able to move his family up to the western frontier?"

"That and other things."

"And it was worth the sacrifice of Lady—Gheorge, Lisa, and anyone else who may get hurt when the strike is put down?"

The Major paused for a moment before replying. Then he said, "You don't win a chess match by hanging on to all your pieces. But it isn't checkmate. Just an exchange of pieces. We'd have liked to do it without giving them Lady, but we couldn't guarantee the strike unless he went there in person. That was Szormeny's own personal view of the situation. In fact, I believe you heard him give it."

"Yes," I said. "I heard his broadcast. I didn't understand it."

"The final sentences—the ones about the long arm of Hungary

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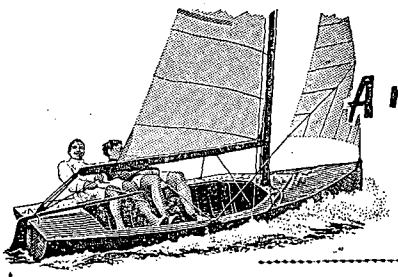

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stretching over the border. It could have been phrased in three pre-arranged ways. The way he actually used meant a straight exchange. Lady and a strike, for himself and his family."

I thought about it for a bit. There didn't seem to be much to say. "You said that I could help?"

"We want you to look after Szormeny and his family until they reach England."

"That was to have been Colin's job?"

"Yes. First impressions are the great thing. Treat them like royalty and you can't go wrong."

"I haven't much experience of escorting royalty," I said, "but I'll do my best. Is it just to be opening doors and ordering meals and making conversation, or do you expect any trouble?"

"I shouldn't think there'd be any trouble. No. The plain fact is, we've caught them on the hop. It will take them quite a time to get reorganized. Of course, they'll get after him in the end. Wherever he goes. Trotsky thought he was safe after ten years in Mexico City. I can lend you a gun if you're nervous."

"I'm as nervous as a kitten," I said, "but I won't bother you for a gun. They've never done me a particle of good. I'll trust to my wits this time."

"You're learning," said the Major.

"I'm beginning to learn," I said, "among other things, what a blundering nuisance I've been. I pictured myself as a hero of romance, jumping in to the aid of his country. Whereas all I


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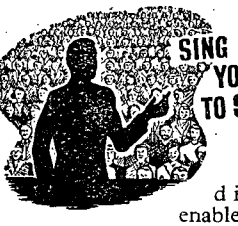

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really did was to land with both feet into the middle of someone else's careful plans. It's a miracle I didn't do even more damage."

He didn't pretend not to understand me. "I'm glad you didn't come to any real harm," he said. "And you did us one good turn. If any single man combined the brains and authority to put a spoke in our wheel it was Colonel Dru."

"He hit a telegraph post," I said. "Swerving to avoid a child."

"I read about it in the papers," said the Major. "I also happen to have had a message from Radk. You repaid us good for evil there. My private opinion is that Lady was a little rough on you."

"No rougher than he was with himself."

"Oh no. Quite so. An odd type. All scent and natty suitings on the outside and hard as steel inside." He added, inconsequentially, "My father, who was born Pfeiffer, was stationed at Constantinople before the First World War. I was quite young, of course, but I can remember being introduced to Enver. He and Lady had a great deal in common. I think I should get off to bed now. I'll have a car here at two o'clock. The train goes at half past. There's a plane laid on for you at Klagenfurt."

In fact, a thick mist put paid to our plane, and we went on by train to Paris, so I had Szormeny and his family to myself for the whole of their first twenty-four hours in the western world.

I began to appreciate just why Colin had been laid on for the job. Szormeny had a little German and a working knowledge of Russian, but he was only comfortable in his native Hungarian.

I jotted down what I could and, when I got back, wrote a clear and connected account of my whole adventure. My notes went to the Cabinet.

There was a private plane at Orly. We took off at first light, and landed at Ferryfield a little over an hour later. Why we didn't go straight to London Airport I have no idea, and the distinguished Foreign Office types must have left their beds very early to be on the Kent coast at that hour in the morning.

I have no doubt that Colin would have been on Christian-name terms with all of them, but they were just newspaper faces to me, and I handed my charges over to them, and they bowed and smiled and the Szormenys bowed and smiled, and even I did a bit of bowing and smiling myself. Then the big car doors slammed, and I declined politely to share a back seat with an Under-secretary, and went off to find my train.

I bought all the papers I could lay hands on. There wasn't a word in any of them yet about Szormeny's defection. The situation, I gathered, was now under control, and my eye suddenly caught the statement that *a man called Lady, an ex-politician with several aliases, had been arrested.*

It seemed a poor sort of epitaph.

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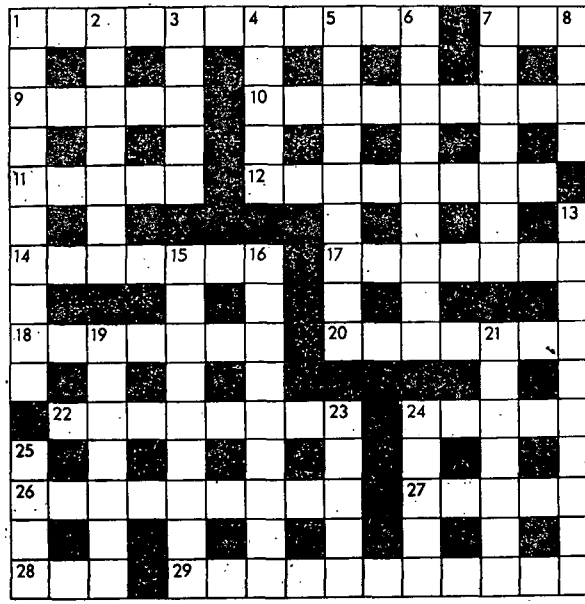
# ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 107

★



## CLUES

### Across

1 You can't float a company on this! (7-4).

7 A wink to a waiter ? (3).

9 With a hundred eyes, he failed as a guard (5).

10 Milliner who had a *succès fou* ? (3, 6).

11 More than the auctioneer knocks down (5).

12 Rank at arms and the law (8).

14 He made the wires hum (7).

17 Amazon's way of keeping level (7).

18 Broken hill in spate (7).

20 Boring boxer ? (4, 4).

22 Report on mother and child ? (8).

24 You'll find it in the slender (5).

26 O mute slur—steady on ! (9).

27 This'll cramp your style (5).

28 Hoarse opposition (3).

29 Outpost philosophers (11).

### Down

1 This P.O.W. babe grows upwards (10).

2 Trifler with a black look (7).

3 In Pekin settlements (5).

4 Dickensian cover girls (5).

5 The right touch for a dirty deal (9)

6 Raid metal in an encircling move (9).

7 At Bottom a queen (7).

8 The word for Simon (4).

13 Are they left behind after rush hours ? (10).

15 Sounds like the opposite of a closed shop (4, 5).

16 Disastrous start to a meal (2, 3, 4).

19 Where wily birds feather their nests (7).

21 The French says cravats here (7).

23 Mr. Greene's took all (5).

24 It stands to reason, you can chop it (5).

25 Not a harrowing school (4).

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*Student* 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it. . *Student* 778/2119: I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student* 184/315: As you suggested, I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student* 181/282: You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they offered *me* Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . .' *Student* 591/287: You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student* 120/288: I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student* 1179/347: I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student* 1954/157: I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**: they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student* 171/162: I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student* 1106/156: The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—*fee 9 guineas—after my first* lesson . . . *Student* 141/76: The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY-MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.

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